

The Dawning of New Diplomacy

When the People's Republic of China was founded on October 1, 1949, the event not only marked the end of twenty-two years of often bloody contests for power between the Communists and the Nationalists, but also signaled a unified mainland China once again under a single government for the first time since 1911. The “great divide” of 1949 impelled the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to transform from “sovereignty-free” into “sovereignty-bound” in postwar international relations.¹ This change of hands of the Chinese government seriously upset the system negotiated at Yalta by the three big powers—the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union—for arrangements in postwar Asia. At once, the CCP leaders found themselves under great pressures from a hostile international environment. At the same time, they also faced the daunting task of establishing political legitimacy and effective state power destroyed by decades of foreign encroachment and domestic strife at home. Both challenges at the time of victory had to be answered quickly and decisively.

Leaning to One Side

Although it had never been a ruling party in its twenty-eight-year history until 1949, the CCP was not a newcomer to the international scene. As scholars point out, the CCP was not just a political movement, but also “an armed revolutionary party with a territorial base.”² Sustained by its military and political organizations, the CCP had formulated its rudimentary foreign policies and carried out a quasi-official diplomacy throughout the war years. By the time it came to power in 1949, the CCP had accumulated considerable experience of haggling with foreign powers, especially the United States and

the Soviet Union, and assembled a group of veterans in foreign affairs, headed by Zhou Enlai.

Drawing on past experiences and immediate concerns, the CCP leadership, on the eve of new China, made a critical policy choice: it rejected a possible middle path between the “two camps” emerging from the start of the Cold War in Europe and chose to side with the Soviet Union as its major ally. The policy became known as “leaning to one side.” It was controversial from the beginning because of its seemingly uncompromising disposition and offensive ideological vigor. Nevertheless, from the vantage point of the new leaders, it was a logical choice born of imperatives and necessity. The policy not only delivered the right policy instrument to meet the new regime’s urgent need for international acceptance and assistance from its socialist allies, but it also provided ideological justification for the CCP to instill its revolutionary agenda into both foreign and domestic policies.³

In addition, the CCP leadership also initiated two lesser-known policies that also had direct bearing on the new China’s foreign relations with the rest of the world. The two policies, coded metaphorically as “building a new kitchen” and “cleaning house before inviting guests in,” were first disclosed during Mao Zedong’s meeting with Stalin’s secret envoy, Anastas Mikoyan, a Soviet Politburo member, during the latter’s visit to the CCP’s headquarters in Xibaipo in February 1949. The policies were later reaffirmed by the Second Plenary Session of the Seventh CCP Central Committee in March, right after the peaceful takeover of Beiping (Beijing) from the Nationalist forces.

The first policy, “building a new kitchen,” established the principle of nonrecognition of any diplomatic representations and treaties with foreign countries that the CCP inherited from the Nationalist government. The stridency of the policy reflected the grave concern of the CCP leaders over the magnitude of political, economic, and cultural penetration of the old China by foreign powers under previous Chinese governments. As Mao alleged, “The old China was a semicolonial country controlled by imperialism” on all fronts. Only by refusing to accord legal recognition to foreign diplomatic organizations and personnel of the Nationalist period and to all unequal treaties and by abolishing all imperialist propaganda agencies and exerting immediate control over foreign trade and customs, Mao asserted, could the Chinese people stand up in defiance of imperialism.⁴

The policy gave the CCP the high ground of anti-imperialism to rally political support at home and also, in a realistic sense, helped the new regime avoid many pitfalls and ambiguities embedded in the old diplomat-

ic relations and foreign treaties concluded by its predecessors. As one Chinese scholar notes, the founding of the PRC single-handedly reduced 1,175 unequal treaties signed by successive Chinese governments since 1842 to mere wastepaper.⁵ The inevitable outcome of the policy was the nullification of all existing diplomatic relations of the new China. It was no small irony that at a time when the new regime urgently needed international recognition and goodwill, it found itself stripped bare and isolated. Subsequently the PRC government and its diplomats spent more than thirty years in restoring relations that were abolished by the radical mood of the young republic in its early years.

The second policy, “cleaning house before inviting guests in,” was designed to postpone diplomatic relations with “imperialist” countries, mainly the United States. Mao as the chief architect of new China’s foreign policy had both political and personal reasons to distrust the Americans. Through his limited contacts with the Americans during the war period, Mao experienced two failures of cooperation with the United States, and these confirmed his long-held assertion that imperialists would never treat the Chinese people as equal.⁶ Since the 1930s Mao had decried the absolute antipathy between the Chinese revolution and “imperialist” countries’ virulent intentions in China. It was his belief that the latter would resort to direct military intervention when a revolutionary war threatened their vested interests in China. In the last few years of the civil war, when it became clear that the United States would not directly intervene, Mao was still convinced that the Americans would use other than military means to block the advance of the revolution in China.⁷

On the grounds of his conviction and distrust of Americans, Mao vehemently recommended the principle of postponing diplomatic relations with “imperialist” countries until China as a “family house” was put in order. Mao said, “We should not be in a hurry to solve [the problem of recognition by the imperialist countries]. We should not be in a hurry now nor need to be in a hurry to solve it even for a fairly long period after country-wide victory.”⁸

The “house cleaning” was eagerly and systematically carried out after the CCP came to power. Priority was given to areas where special privileges were accorded to foreign governments and residents through unequal treaties, such as foreign garrisons, inland shipping, and maritime customs. As for foreign business, cultural, religious, and other organizations, the new regime initiated more subtle but equally aggressive methods to “squeeze them out” of China.⁹ The goal was nothing less than complete eradication of residual foreign influence from China. The outbreak of the Korean War

accelerated the process. By 1954, Mao concluded, “Our house has been cleaned, and now we can invite the guests in.”¹⁰ But the question had already been shifted from who should be invited to who would come.

Sorting Out Enemies from Friends

Although calling for establishing diplomatic relations with all countries on the basis of equality and mutual respect from early on, Mao and other Chinese leaders, adhering to the rigid dichotomous view of “two camps,” never expected that capitalist countries, let alone “imperialist” countries, would recognize the new Chinese government soon. They put their bet solely on their socialist allies.¹¹ Under Mao’s instructions, the PRC government followed a calibrated policy that categorized foreign countries as socialist countries, capitalist countries, and imperialist countries and approached each group with distinctively different policies. For a while, this approach seemed to be validated by the divergent reactions of foreign governments.

Led by the Soviet Union, the socialist countries responded enthusiastically to the Chinese request for diplomatic recognition. For the Chinese, it was a relief. Although Mao and others genuinely believed that siding with the Soviet Union was in the best interests of the Chinese revolution, their past vacillating relations with the Soviet leader, Stalin himself, cast a long shadow on the minds of the CCP leaders. The policy of “leaning to one side” was offered to dispel any lingering doubts Stalin might have about the CCP. Four months after Mao expressed his eagerness to establish formal relations with the Soviet Union in his meeting with Stalin’s emissary Mikoyan in February 1949, Liu Shaoqi made a secret visit to Moscow and held five talks with Stalin and other Soviet leaders. One of the four major issues on the agenda was Soviet diplomatic recognition of the future CCP government. Recognizing the rapidly changing situation in China, Stalin readily gave his approval of the CCP and favored diplomatic exchange at the expense of the Nationalist government. On October 2, the Soviet government became the first foreign government to formally recognize the PRC.

Although in its diplomatic note to Beijing Moscow did not raise the issue of its relations with the Nationalist government, the Soviet vice-foreign minister, Andrei Gromyko, informed the Nationalist chargé d’affaires in Moscow on the same day that his government considered its relation with the latter terminated and had decided to call back its diplomats from Guangzhou, where the remaining Nationalist government was temporarily situated.¹² Pleased by Moscow’s swift action, Zhou on behalf of the Chinese government immediately agreed to exchange diplomatic representa-

tives with the Soviet Union. This became a model quickly copied by other socialist countries—Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, North Korea, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Mongolia, Albania, East Germany, and North Vietnam. With a simple exchange of diplomatic notes, the new Chinese government established diplomatic relations with all socialist countries except Yugoslavia within three months of its birth.¹³

The reactions from the second group, capitalist countries, were more complicated. First, the classification of the group was misleading and dubious. Earlier Mao had made clear distinctions between the capitalist countries and the countries that were later defined as the Third World. In his famous “paper tiger” conversation with American journalist Anna Louise Strong in 1946, Mao described the zone between the United States and the Soviet Union as composed of capitalist, colonial, and semicolonial countries. Yet after 1947, as a fallout of the Cold War ideological confrontation, Mao accepted the “two camps” theory and dropped his view on the “intermediate zone.” Consequently, the former colonial countries were lumped together with the Western states and classified as capitalist countries.

The issue was further complicated by those countries’ relations with the Nationalist regime. When Zhou Enlai served the note favoring diplomatic relations to foreign governments on the PRC’s founding day, Beijing had yet to effect complete control over its territory; the Nationalist forces still occupied some major cities in the south and southwest. Under the circumstances, many foreign governments including some neighboring countries adopted a “wait-and-see” attitude. Some expressed the desire to keep “informal” contact with the new regime while keeping their formal pledge to the Nationalists. As indicated in a cable by the Australian government to its consul in Shanghai on October 25, “the democratic countries” were waiting for the new Chinese government to fulfill three preconditions before any diplomatic recognition: *de facto* control over its territory, readiness to fulfill its international obligations, and majority support at home.¹⁴

In mid-October, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) took over Guangzhou, one of the strongholds of the Nationalist forces in the south. At the end of November, Chiang Kai-shek and his government were driven out of Chongqing, the war capital of the Nationalist government. By the end of the year, Beijing had effective control over most of its territory except Taiwan, Hainan, and Tibet. The Nationalist government’s claim over China was diminished to the island of Taiwan. Accepting the new reality, some countries after December 1949 started to explore the possibility of exchanging diplomatic relations with the PRC. Burma was the first nonsocialist country to recognize Beijing and was followed by a dozen others, includ-

ing India, Britain, Norway, Israel, and Finland. The recognitions came as a surprise. The CCP leaders had underestimated these countries' pragmatism and willingness to accommodate political and ideological diversity in international diplomacy.

At the same time, with both Beijing and Taiwan claiming the legitimate right over China, the question of how to clarify the situation and through what process remained. Mao defined the issue and set the tone for its solution in a cable to Liu Shaoqi and Zhou Enlai concerning China's diplomatic relations with Burma. He informed his colleagues that foreign governments had to sever their relations with the Nationalists and that the establishment of diplomatic relations depended on the result of bilateral negotiations. Mao made it clear that "this procedure of negotiation is absolutely necessary and should be applied to all capitalist countries."¹⁵ According to Mao's instruction, the Chinese negotiators sought to clarify three issues with their counterparts prior to establishing diplomatic relations: diplomatic relations with the ousted Nationalist government, PRC representation in the United Nations, and returning to Beijing the property and property rights belonging to the former Nationalist government in foreign countries.¹⁶ These conditions for diplomatic relations were soon neatly packed into a diplomatic formula during Beijing's negotiation with the Indian government over the issue of recognition, which was later labeled the India model.¹⁷ It stated that the PRC was the sole legal government of China and that Taiwan was an inalienable part of China. The term has subsequently been applied to most of Beijing's negotiations with foreign governments (except a few cases in which the foreign governments resisted the explicitly expressed commitment of cutting off relations with Taiwan and resolved the issue in other ways).

In its implementation, even though Mao termed the need for negotiation as "absolute," Beijing more than once displayed a certain willingness to accommodate special circumstances. For both Indonesia and Finland, which did not have diplomatic relations with the Nationalist government and were not members of the United Nations at the time, the PRC government relinquished the precondition of negotiation.¹⁸ With other countries, once Beijing (through negotiation) was satisfied with their governments' policy on the issue of the Nationalist regime, diplomatic relations quickly followed.

By its first anniversary, the PRC had established diplomatic relations with eight countries outside the socialist bloc: neighboring countries India, Burma, and Indonesia and a few Western European countries—Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and Finland. The outbreak of the

Korean War drastically affected this process and interrupted several negotiations, including those with the British. Within the next three years, until 1954, the PRC was able to net only one more country, Pakistan, for its diplomatic corps.

The most difficult and controversial relations were with the third group, imperialist countries. The group, theoretically, included the countries of the whole “reactionary camp,” such as Japan, West Germany, the United States, Italy, Britain, and France.¹⁹ In practice, Mao clearly targeted the United States as the foremost adversary of China’s nationalism and Communist ideology. Policy toward this imperialist group was, in retrospect, the most intricate and multifaceted, and it contorted the PRC’s relations with these countries.

The convolutions of the policy were rooted in the incongruity between Beijing’s practical need for international recognition and business and its stringent ideological confrontation with the Western countries. The policy was further confounded when the Chinese leaders subjected diplomatic relations with these countries to China’s domestic constraints, such as reforming China’s “capitalist class” and intellectuals and improving agricultural and industrial production at home.²⁰ Constantly changing priorities on its agenda, the PRC leadership was never able to subscribe to a single and consistent policy toward the so-called imperialist countries, even in the case of the United States. The situation became even more entangled when the PRC policy makers tried to exploit any possible discords in the “imperialist camp” under the name of “united front,” which stressed focusing on the main enemy while finding common ground with lesser enemies. The united front strategy had led the CCP to victory in the wars against the Japanese and later, the Nationalists, and the PRC leadership fully intended to use the same weapon on the diplomatic front.

A well-studied example is the PRC’s discriminatory policy toward the United States and Britain in the early years. As some recent studies indicate, the policy rift between the United States and Britain on the China issue in the early years clearly existed, a result not only of their different diplomatic styles but also of their different perspectives on China.²¹ American and British governments disputed each other on almost every important issue concerning China. Diplomatic recognition was one of them. They differed on this issue over both the timing of recognition and the best way to drive a wedge between the PRC and the Soviet Union. Whereas the Truman administration firmly opposed any “hasty recognition” of the PRC, the British government believed that the best hope for Britain was to keep a foot in the door. The British and the Americans never reconciled their differences.

Though both countries desired to keep a common front on the issue, when the British Labour government finally extended formal recognition to the PRC in January 1950, followed by some other Western European countries, the clear effect, as Gordon Chang has described, was that “the Western front against China had been broken.”²²

The CCP leadership did not hesitate to exploit the situation and openly adopted a policy of “preferential treatment” toward the British. As records from these early times have shown, the CCP adopted a more flexible and pragmatic policy toward Britain. To alleviate any anxieties the British government might feel about its interest in the area on the eve of the CCP’s takeover of China, the CCP leaders through various channels signaled to the British tacit approval of the status quo in Hong Kong and a promise of no interference in its affairs. Zhou Enlai himself also welcomed a British initiative to open trade with China. Even the *Amethyst* incident in April 1949 did not change the CCP’s basic policy toward Britain: the Chinese did not want to “make too much of it.”²³

The Americans bitterly resented the policy. They were keenly aware that the CCP leaders were trying to split the American-British alliance just as U.S. leaders were trying to split the Sino-Soviet alliance. If wedge driving was the shared strategy of the Chinese and the Americans, they shared equal misfortunes in their efforts, at least in the early years. For the Chinese, an unrepentant British government clinging to its imperialist past and deferring to the American leadership, which pursued a hostile policy toward the Chinese revolution, explained the lack of progress.²⁴ But another reason for the Chinese failure to capitalize on the Anglo-American rift, less discussed by the Chinese, was the inconsistency of China’s own policy.

The British recognized the PRC government on January 6, 1950, and nominated John Hutchinson as the chargé d’affaires to Beijing. Zhou Enlai replied on January 9, accepting Hutchinson as the British representative in the “negotiation on the question of establishing diplomatic relations.”²⁵ When the British sought clarification on the meaning of such “negotiations,” Mao decided to stall the process. In his cable to Liu Shaoqi on January 20, Mao instructed, “As for the answer to Great Britain, you should delay it. The comrades in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs do not understand the reasons for the delay, and are thus of the opinion that it would lead to a deadlock. That is incorrect: there is no deadlock; the initiative is entirely in our hands.”²⁶

In Mao’s mind, this was a contest for prestige as well as a tactic to delay the reentry of the “American imperialist clique” into new China.²⁷ Ostensibly, the delaying tactic was in accordance with the principle of post-

poning diplomatic relations with imperialist countries. Yet it contradicted the earlier, more accommodating policy toward Britain and the principle of the united front, which targeted the United States as the primary hostile party. In the subsequent negotiations, which finally started in March 1950, the British government's ambivalence concerning its official relations with Taiwan and property disputes between Beijing and Taiwan in Hong Kong, such as the aircraft of the China National Aviation Corporation (CNAC) and the Central Air Transport Corporation (CATC), did not help the situation at all.²⁸ The two sides were hopelessly deadlocked in their equally intransigent positions until the Korean War suspended the negotiations. Not until four years later did the PRC establish partial diplomatic relations with Britain, and it was twenty-two more years until relations were upgraded to full ambassadorial level (in 1972).

Most of the PRC's official accounts of the events blame the British for the fruitless negotiations of the early years. Yet the records clearly indicate that in the 1950s, the bottom line of the PRC's foreign policy was to avoid diplomatic relations with the countries perceived as threatening to China's security and stability. After 1949 the British were put into that category. In retrospect, the irony is that the policy of postponing the establishment of diplomatic relations with imperialist countries would have had no effect on the original target—the United States—because of its nonrecognition policy toward China. Yet it worked so effectively on Britain that London's early recognition of the PRC only brought perpetual negotiation and frustration over establishing diplomatic relations with China.

Starting from Scratch

Despite its policy missteps and the negative effects of the Korean War, by mid-1951 the PRC had established diplomatic relations with eleven socialist countries, four Asian neighbors, and four Western European countries. As a result, Beijing was obligated to send diplomats abroad. Contrary to some scholars' suggestions, the new administration suffered from the same problem the Soviet Union did in its early years: it did not have enough qualified diplomats.²⁹ This lack did not stem from Chinese leaders' disregarding foreign affairs, as Lenin once did, or from the nonavailability of veteran diplomats. It was a deliberate political choice.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC was officially inaugurated on November 8, 1949. Structurally, it did not deviate from a typical foreign office in any other country or from its Nationalist predecessor. It was divided into six area and functional departments, two special committees (inter-

national treaties and foreign policy), and one general office.⁵⁰ But its aim was different. The new institution was intended as a negation of so-called capitalist diplomacy. It disavowed China's diplomacy of the past century as a humiliating exercise conducted on "bended knees."⁵¹ Determined to start fresh, the new administration abolished the old system and shunned diplomats from the former Nationalist government, except a few specialists. Instead, at Zhou's recommendation, the administration assembled its own contingent of diplomats from three sources: veterans from the periods of wartime quasi diplomacy, military officers from the PLA, and foreign-language students from universities. The initial recruitment was about 170.⁵²

The first group was easily the most experienced among the three and had the closest working relations with Zhou. Many veterans from this group had started to rally around Zhou in 1937, when the CCP began to establish its functional foreign affairs apparatus in the Nationalist-occupied areas, taking advantage of the CCP-Nationalist wartime alliance. Zhou and his quasi diplomats were particularly active in the 1940s under the cover of the Chongqing office of the Eighth Route Army in the war capital of the Nationalist government.⁵³ In 1944, when the U.S. government sent a military observer group, known as the Dixie Mission, to Yan'an, Zhou proclaimed the official "beginning of our diplomatic work," which brought into being a foreign affairs group under the Military Committee of the CCP.⁵⁴ After the wartime cooperation with the Nationalist government collapsed in 1947, the Chongqing and Yan'an groups were joined together and established the Foreign Affairs Group of the Central Committee. Ye Jianying was the group leader with Wang Bingnan as his deputy.⁵⁵ Throughout the civil war, the group mainly engaged in research, translation, and collection of information. Before and after October 1949, the group was the ad interim foreign office under Zhou until the MFA was organized.

It came as no surprise that the people from this group filled most of the key posts in the new ministry. For example, Li Kenong, who was in charge of the CCP intelligence network and had been an associate of Zhou since 1929,⁵⁶ and Zhang Hanfu, who had studied in the United States in the early years and since 1939 had worked for Zhou as the editor of *Xinhua Daily* and other assignments, occupied two of the three vice-minister posts.⁵⁷ Zhou's right-hand man, Wang Bingnan, led the largest department in the MFA, the General Office. One of Wang's deputies, Yan Baohang, was Zhou's secret contact in Chongqing, and the other, Dong Yueqian, had been involved in the CCP's wartime foreign affairs since 1937.⁵⁸ Others of Zhou's most trusted assistants during various periods, including Qiao Guanhua, Gong Peng, Yang Gang, and Chen Jiakang, were also given positions as di-

rectors or deputy directors in the MFA. During his eight-year tenure as foreign minister, Zhou heavily relied on this small core group to carry out sensitive diplomatic missions and run an ever-expanding organization without the benefit of a large minister's office in the MFA.

The second group, military officers, constituted the majority of the newly recruited staff of the MFA. The original order from the Central Committee and the Military Committee of the CCP was to select one officer at the division level and two officers at the regiment level from each corps with a minimum of middle-school education.³⁹ Given that in 1949 there were about fifty-three corps under four field armies and that the total MFA staff numbered only 170 or so, it is doubtful that each corps actually fulfilled the quota. About a hundred officers were actually recruited and later assumed mid- or lower-rank positions in the ministry and in the embassies abroad. Some of the newly recruited military officers were veterans from the 1945 Marshall Mission, an ill-fated U.S. effort to stabilize the Nationalist regime without direct American military intervention. Although the mission had brought the military officers together with the members of the first group from early on, the military group as a whole was distinctive in many aspects and never totally integrated with others in the MFA throughout their diplomatic careers.⁴⁰

Given the long military history and predominant Party-military leadership of the CCP, the strong military presence in the new MFA was expected. Some sources further suggested that the practice was copied from the early Soviet experience, when they did not have enough diplomats.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the CCP leaders, especially Zhou, were not simply employing the military as an expedient substitute to fill in blank spots. The goal was none other than to build a "PLA in civilian clothes." The CCP leaders perceived diplomacy as a continuation of their struggle against imperialism; the only difference between diplomacy and war rested with means rather than goals. Zhou told his audience in his inauguration speech at the MFA, "As in military warfare, diplomacy is just another 'war' but of words."⁴² To win the new type of war, the CCP leadership needed to build a new type of army. Using the PLA veterans as the embryonic implant, Zhou and other leaders hoped that the new institution would inherit the PLA's fighting spirit, discipline, strategic vision, and "revolutionary traditions."⁴³ Harold Nicolson once noted two schools of diplomatic theory: the military and the commercial. The former, a survival of the feudal system, was concerned with national prestige and status; it aimed at victory. The policies and tactics for this school were "conceived and managed from the military rather than from the civilian point of view," and diplomacy was "war by other means."⁴⁴ The CCP leaders and the diplomacy under their auspices in these early years conspicuously fit this militant mode.

The majority of the third group were foreign-language students hastily trained by the CCP's own language school. The Foreign Affairs School (the present Beijing Foreign Studies University) was established in 1948 under the direction of the Foreign Affairs Group of the Central Committee with dozens of young students enrolled from Chongqing and other cities by Zhou's instruction. Within six months after the fall of Beijing in January 1949, most of the students had been assigned work in the alien affairs offices in major cities taken over by the PLA. In mid-1949, the school was designated to train translators and foreign service officers for the future MFA. Some forty outstanding foreign-language students recommended by some of the most prestigious universities in Tianjin and Beijing were enrolled in the school's intensive political-training courses for short periods and then assigned to jobs relating to foreign affairs. Another eight hundred students, studying English, Russian, German, and French, stayed in the school for various lengths of time before being pulled away by the urgent needs of the new government for foreign-language talent. By the summer of 1952, all of the first cohort of students had graduated.⁴⁵ The exact number of students who eventually joined the MFA is not known, but language students, especially the graduates from this school, became the regular pool for the MFA's annual recruitment for entry-level staff.⁴⁶

Although the qualifications for all the new recruits were set as a clean political record, personal integrity, discipline, certain skills for diplomatic work, and good health,⁴⁷ political reliability was the unyielding *sine qua non*. The initial MFA personnel regulations stipulated that "virtue and ability are the basic criteria for selecting cadres."⁴⁸ "Virtue" meant political loyalty, and "ability" was not so much about one's functional expertise as the "ability to accomplish the work entrusted by the people."⁴⁹ Until 1951, Zhou Enlai put forward a four-point guideline: holding firmly one's political stand, having a good grasp of foreign policies, diligently improving one's functional work, and strictly observing discipline.⁵⁰ Although Zhou's guideline did not veer far from the typical standard of "red" and "expert" required for the PRC bureaucrats under the cadre system, it specified knowledge of foreign affairs and strict discipline as special requirements for diplomats. The four points became, for many years, the principal criteria of the MFA for recruiting and promoting diplomats.

The Founding Generation of Ambassadors

The PRC government appointed its first ambassador, Wang Jiaxiang, accredited to the Soviet Union, on October 3, 1949. Wang's appointment was

followed by sixteen more first-time ambassadorial appointments over the next two years, until the Korean War froze the PRC's foreign relations. They were Jiyatai, Peng Mingzhi, Wang Youping, Ni Zhiliang, Wang Renshu, Huang Zhen, Yao Zhongming, Cao Xiangren, Tan Xilin, Yuan Zhongxian, Geng Biao, Ji Pengfei, Feng Xuan, Zhang Wentian, Han Nianlong, and Zeng Yongquan. Five of them—Wang Jiaxiang, Jiyatai, Wang Renshu, Yao Zhongming, and Zhang Wentian—were Party functionaries, working at various levels of the Party organization. The rest, who were known as “general ambassadors,” were all senior military officers.

Besides the political consideration discussed above, the military phenomenon in ambassadorial appointments had an additional institutional dimension in those early years. As scholars often point out, World War II witnessed the decline in importance of resident ambassadors and the growing tendency of foreign ministers and heads of state to take over diplomatic activities traditionally assigned to the diplomats.⁵¹ This tendency was several times amplified in China. From the beginning, foreign policy making in the PRC was highly centralized and personalistic. Mao and Zhou were not only the ultimate decision makers, as the heads of the administration, they also supervised the functional and implementation aspects of China's foreign policy. Zhou, especially, with his photographic memory, was known as the master of details. Throughout the Mao-Zhou period, the MFA was under the direct micromanagement of the Chinese supreme leaders.

Mao was relentless in guarding his absolute control over foreign affairs in these early years. He concerned himself with matters across the entire range from major policy making to details of execution. One telling example was Mao's insistence that “except routine matters, all relatively important diplomatic replies [to foreign governments] must be submitted to the Premier [Zhou Enlai] and me for approval before they are dispatched.”⁵² Mao twice personally reprimanded Zhang Hanfu, the veteran vice-minister of the MFA, for failing to send him dispatches in advance over such matters as the training of six hundred Korean technicians in China.⁵³ Under tremendous pressure, Zhou as foreign minister had little choice but to keep the best and most experienced talents in foreign affairs on hand in Beijing to deal with the most imminent issues, such as negotiations over diplomatic relations.⁵⁴ Veterans from the Chongqing and Yan'an days, such as Li Kenong, Zhang Hanfu, Gong Peng, and Qiao Guanhua, were never appointed ambassadors abroad.⁵⁵ Others, such as Ke Bonian, Wang Bingnan, Chen Jiakang, and Zhang Wenjin, made their ambassadorial debuts only years later. As a result, the most seasoned hands the PRC possessed in foreign affairs were off the ambassadorial candidates list, and new ambassadors had

to come largely from other sources. Military officers were chosen, again, as the preferable alternatives.

The first seventeen ambassadors were all born between 1900 and 1915. As a group, in their formative years they were deeply influenced by (or participated in) epic-making events such as the 1911 Revolution and the May Fourth Movement in 1919. When the CCP was founded in 1921, they were among the first generation to join and were pledged to fight for its cause. Two of them participated in the Northern Expedition and the famous Nanchang Uprising of 1927, which founded an independent military force for the CCP—the Red Army.⁵⁶ Nine of them were survivors of the Long March of 1934–36. During the war against Japan and the civil war afterward, they were high-ranking Party organizers or military commanders or worked secretly for the CCP in the Nationalist-ruled areas. On the eve of 1949, they held positions above the prefectural level or equivalent in civilian cases and above the army level in the military ranks.

Wang Jiaxiang and Zhang Wentian held the highest status among the group when they were appointed, successively, as the first and the second PRC ambassadors to the Soviet Union in 1949 and 1951. Wang was a member of the CCP Central Committee, and Zhang was a member of the Politburo at the time. (Wang and Zhang had been the primary leaders of the Party after the Zunyi meeting of 1935.)⁵⁷ Partially because of their seniority within the Party, Mao and Zhou recommended them to the ambassadorship in the Soviet Union, the most important ally of the PRC during the period.

Aside from seniority, another consideration for appointment seems to have been familiarity with local affairs of the host countries. Wang Jiaxiang studied at Moscow's Sun Yat-sen University and, later, at the elite College of Red Professors, a proud product of the October Revolution in the Soviet Union, from 1925 to 1930. From 1937 to 1938, he was the CCP's representative to the Comintern. These experiences ranked him as one of the leading Russian experts in China. In 1949, he accompanied Liu Shaoqi on his secret visit to Moscow, and Wang's personal knowledge of the Russian system and Stalin himself were crucial to the success of Liu's meetings with Stalin.⁵⁸ Zhang Wentian had similar but even broader experiences. He first went to study in Japan and then, the United States. In the same years as Wang Jiaxiang, Zhang studied and later worked in the same universities in Moscow until 1931. His unusually extensive foreign exposure and language capabilities must have convinced Mao that Zhang was the suitable candidate for the ambassadorship to the United Nations. Later, when the attempt to expel the Nationalist representative from the United Nations failed,

Zhang was appointed successor to Wang Jiexiang, who was in 1951 appointed the director of the newly founded International Liaison Department of the CCP Central Committee.

Two other civilian ambassadorial appointments—Jiyatai to Mongolia and Wang Renshu to Indonesia—may also be understood in the same light. Jiyatai, a native Mongolian, participated in the May Fourth Movement as a young student and joined the CCP in 1925. From 1929 to 1934, he was a secret Party activist working in the northern part of China. From 1938 to 1946, he worked in Outer Mongolia as an organizer of the local overseas Chinese affairs. Zhou Enlai was obviously well informed about Jiyatai's qualifications and attached great significance to them. In a meeting with Jiyatai before his departure for Mongolia, Zhou told him that his language capabilities (Russian and Mongolian) and familiarity with local affairs were helpful and most suitable for his new job. Jiyatai was not the only Mongolian in the Chinese embassy. His first secretary was also a native Mongolian.⁵⁹

Wang Renshu, a trained teacher and writer, joined the CCP in 1924 and engaged in the Party's propaganda work among Chinese intellectuals in Shanghai in the 1930s. When the Pacific War broke out in 1941, Wang went to Indonesia via Hong Kong and stayed there until 1948. He was active in the Indonesian movement for independence and in local education. For his activities, he was given the name of "Pak Bahren" (Father Bahren) by the local people as "a token of appreciation and gratitude."⁶⁰ Regarding Wang's qualifications, Merle Cochran, at the time the U.S. ambassador to Thailand, made an interesting observation. In his report to the State Department on Wang's background in 1950, Cochran remarked that Wang "may be handicapped somewhat by his reported ignorance of any Western languages—his linguistic achievements being confined to his native tongue and Indonesian."⁶¹ The remark is interesting because in the early 1950s, only about half the American diplomats could speak a foreign language; and in the early 1960s, one-third of American diplomats still spoke no foreign language at all.⁶² By contrast, in the newly established Chinese foreign service, one-third of its ambassadorial appointments (six out of seventeen) had knowledge of at least one foreign language. Although Wang might have been handicapped by his lack of knowledge of major Western languages, ambassadorial appointees such as Jiyatai and Wang Renshu were among the best candidates the MFA could find in the early years.

The only civilian ambassador who had never traveled to a foreign country before his appointment was Yao Zhongming, the ambassador to Burma. His pre-1949 experiences were largely restricted to the Shandong area, ex-

cept for six years (1939–45) in Yan'an. At the time of his appointment, he was the deputy Party secretary of the Jinan municipal CCP committee in Shandong province. Yao's own explanation for his unexpected diplomatic appointment is that he was once the CCP representative in the Qingdao field group during the Marshall Mission, and after 1949, when he was the mayor of Yantai, he supervised the city's foreign affairs office.⁶⁵ Compared to his other civilian colleagues, Yao was the least experienced ambassador-to-be.

If most of the civilian ambassadors were suitably qualified for their posts, a conspicuous lack of international experience was characteristic of the military ambassadors. Among them, only three—Yuan Zhongxian, Zeng Yongquan, and Feng Xuan—had been abroad, and their experiences were confined largely to the Soviet Union. Three others—Huang Zhen, Geng Biao, and Han Nianlong—had been exposed to some contacts with foreigners during the war against Japan and the Marshall Mission. Yet those experiences were not always conducive to success in their future diplomatic careers. For instance, in his autobiography, Geng Biao records a vivid memory of his first encounter with an American observer group in 1944. He remembered them as a group of spoiled, arrogant, and undisciplined soldiers; he got their attention only when he lost his temper with them. This group of American soldiers later called him a “fearless leader.”⁶⁴ In 1950, when he was appointed a member of the Chinese delegation to the United Nations, he told Zhou Enlai that he knew nothing about foreign affairs. Zhou reminded him of his experiences with the American observer group and with the Marshall Mission group.

Another handicap for the military group of ambassadors was their elementary level of education compared to that of the civilian ambassadors. Only five out of the twelve military ambassadors had some education at the university level. Huang Zhen, ambassador to Hungary, had studied at the Shanghai Xinhua University of Fine Arts. Han Nianlong, ambassador to Pakistan, had attended the political and economic department of China's Public University (Zhongguo Gongxue) in Shanghai, but he did not finish the course. Yuan Zhongxian, ambassador to India, once studied at the Sun Yat-sen University in Moscow. Zeng Yongquan, ambassador to Poland, studied at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East in Moscow and the Military and Political Institute in Leningrad from 1924 to 1929. Feng Xuan, at age thirty-five the youngest among the group, was the minister to Switzerland when the PRC established diplomatic relations at the ministerial level in 1950 and became the ambassador to Switzerland in 1956 when the two countries upgraded the relationship to full ambassadorial level. He had studied in Moscow's Lenin School as a young man (1933–36).

Among the rest of the military group, Peng Mingzhi, ambassador to Poland, Ni Zhiliang, ambassador to North Korea, and Tan Xilin, ambassador to Czechoslovakia, had studied at Whampoa Military Academy for about a year during various periods. Wang Youping, ambassador to Romania, Cao Xiangren, ambassador to Bulgaria, and Geng Biao, ambassador to Sweden (concurrent minister to Denmark and Finland), and Ji Pengfei, ambassador to East Germany, had only some primary education or no early formal education in regular schools at all. Typical of the first generation of Chinese revolutionaries, they were often self-taught and had gained their knowledge through their extraordinary life experiences.

A good example is Geng Biao. Geng was born to a poor craftsman's family.⁶⁵ His early education consisted of two years of classical studies with a relative who was a traditional scholar but never had passed the imperial examinations. When poverty forced the Geng family to take refuge in a mining town, he became a child laborer in the mines at the age of thirteen. Geng's uncle was a Communist and one of the early labor-movement organizers. Under his influence, Geng joined the Communist Youth League at the age of sixteen. When the miners opened their own night school later, Geng for the first time received an education "much better than the baffling" classical recitals. Mao's younger brother, Mao Zetan, was one of the teachers in the school. He taught Geng some English words; Geng remembered the words "Party" and "communism" best. More than a half century later, Geng recalled that "among the miners, I learned from a most perceptible textbook of social education."⁶⁶

Later in his life, Geng studied military science, economics, and international issues in the Red Army University for about a year; he was in the Central Party School for another three years (1941–44). Outside the school curriculum, he studied classical and modern military theories, both Chinese and foreign. There are no academic degrees on his résumé, but that did not hold him back from becoming a man of intelligence and character. Under normal circumstances, lack of formal education might be a handicap for a professional diplomat, but in China in 1950, nothing was normal.

Aside from the lack of foreign experience and early formal education, the biggest obstacle for the military men to overcome in becoming professional diplomats came from themselves. All of them had been fighting wars for more than twenty years before 1949, and they had tied their personal lives and careers closely to the military forces. Emotionally, none of them were willing to leave the military when they received the orders to report to the MFA. Han Nianlong remembers, "To me, the order to leave the army came so suddenly, and [I] had no knowledge of it at all. I re-

member that after receiving the order, I asked Commander Chen Yi of the Third Field Army whether the Party could consider not to change my job. Commander Chen's reply was straightforward and simple: 'Do not waste your time, carry out the order. . . .' After that, there was nothing for me to say."⁶⁷

The most striking case is that of Wang Youping. Wang has held more ambassadorial posts than any other PRC ambassador to date. In his thirty-year diplomatic career, he served as ambassador to seven countries (Romania, Norway, Cambodia, Cuba, Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Soviet Union), spending only about four years in China between appointments. What makes his case extraordinary is that during his long career, he never stopped asking to return to the army. At the end of his career, he stated in an interview that his only regret in life was that he had had to leave the army. Wang had been a soldier for eighteen years; his thirty-year diplomatic career did not alter his attachment to the army, but only made him a reluctant ambassador.

Some of the ambassadors' wives further complicated the situation. Most of the wives also came from the army and firmly held their ground as equals with their husbands both at home and at work. When they were told that as the wives of the ambassadors they were not needed to work in the embassies and would be called "Mrs.," the wives felt that their cherished independent personalities and equal right to work had been violated. Some threatened to divorce their husbands if they were not given a job. Huang Zhen's wife, Zhu Lin, offers an explanation for the rebellion. On one hand, Zhu says, the wives were eager to make their own contributions to the construction of new China; on the other hand, she acknowledges that even the revolution had not completely altered the old ways of discrimination against women. "The achievement of women's emancipation still depends on our own efforts." She holds that to maintain an equal and independent status, women need jobs.⁶⁸ The complaint of the wives escalated into a crisis, and Zhou had to send his wife, Deng Yingchao, to quench the fire. Deng passed Zhou's message to the rebellious wives: in the foreign service, the policy should be "equal pay for equal work, equal titles for equal positions."⁶⁹ After Zhou's intervention, a compromise was reached. Most of the ambassador's wives, except for those disqualified by health or other reasons, were given various jobs in the embassies according to their abilities, but their diplomatic credentials were not registered in the host country. To the public, they were just the wives of ambassadors. The situation continued until the early 1970s, when the MFA began to appoint some wives as formal diplomats for the first time.⁷⁰

Diplomatic Grooming

Undoubtedly, the founding generation of Chinese ambassadors was a strange cohort. Collectively, they represented the core of the CCP organization and the quintessence of the Chinese revolution since 1921. Individually, they were vibrant people, having lived through threshold events in modern Chinese history as shapers rather than as passive observers. As professional diplomats, they were the least expected and least prepared. In a sense, they were all political appointees.

Fully aware of the limits of these first-time appointees, the MFA set up an intensive training course for the ambassadors, their wives, and a few senior embassy officials. The course was also to serve the purpose of formalizing and standardizing China's diplomatic procedures modeled on international practice. As Zhou Enlai declared in his inauguration speech at the MFA, China now needed to transform its diplomacy from pre-1949 "guerrilla warfare" to "regular warfare," focusing on official representation, formalities, and state-to-state relations.⁷¹ To fulfill the goal, the MFA contrived to establish formal institutional procedures and, accordingly, coach its military appointees into performing diplomats in the shortest possible time.

The training course with forty or so students, known as the "ambassadors training class," started immediately after the inauguration of the MFA in November 1949 and lasted well into July 1950. Li Kenong, the vice-minister of the MFA, was in charge of the course, but the daily operation was left to the General Office, supervised by Wang Bingnan and his deputy, Yan Baohang, whose European education and experience in socializing with Chinese and foreign dignitaries during the Nationalist period qualified him as one of the best training managers for the new recruits.⁷²

The class covered almost every possible facet of diplomacy, ranging from international law and diplomatic practice to ballroom dance and neckties. Eminent Chinese professors and scholars lectured new ambassadors on international law, treaties, diplomatic history, international practices, and documentation. Ambassadors from the Soviet Union and other East European countries—with Mao's eldest son, Mao Anying, as the interpreter—briefed their Chinese colleagues on their own countries and their personal experiences as diplomats. The MFA held an exhibition of diplomatic documents, including diplomatic notes, credentials, and memoranda, to show the ambassadors the kinds of paperwork in diplomatic procedure. To give them more visual exposure to diplomatic protocol, the MFA arranged for the ambassadors to watch from behind a huge Chinese screen as foreign ambassadors presented their credentials to Mao, then the chairman of the PRC.

They also visited the Soviet embassy to gain firsthand knowledge of what an embassy would look like. When one of them asked the Soviet diplomats where their confidential communication room was, of course he did not get an answer. (The other question the Soviet diplomats did not answer was the annual budget of the embassy.) The MFA also hired dance teachers to polish the steps of ambassadors and their wives on the dance floor, for dancing was considered an important part of social skills. The last program on the agenda was to have a Western-style dinner in the Beijing Hotel, one of the grandest at the time. With respect to dress, hairstyles, bearing, and table manners, the ambassadors and their wives were patiently coached by veteran Chinese diplomats who had worked secretly for the CCP in the Nationalist government. Feeling awkward and frustrated, the new ambassadors justified this sudden change in their lifestyles as putting up a show for the sake of the Party. As Ambassador Yuan Zhongxian, who held the highest military rank in the group, said, “As long as it is the Party’s wish, we will play [the roles].”⁷³

During the eight months of training, Zhou Enlai received ambassadors several times and spoke to them at great length on international issues and China’s foreign policy. At the end of the training, Zhou made arrangements for the ambassadors in groups to meet Mao. By and large, the meetings with Mao were pep talks; nevertheless, the leaders’ words revealed some interesting aspects of their perceptions of the ambassadorial appointments at the time.

Mao valued the ambassadors’ political loyalty over their diplomatic qualifications and told them so unabashedly. He said during the meeting that although the new ambassadors did not speak foreign languages, as “generals” they were needed for diplomatic work, because, after all, they would not run away.⁷⁴ At the same time, the political and military experiences of new ambassadors—which equipped them with strategic visions, certain working styles, and a strict sense of discipline—could also be valuable assets for their new jobs. Zhou stressed the importance of discipline, prudence, and limited authorization in the ambassadors’ new jobs.⁷⁵ Zhou’s warning on discipline and authorization became almost legendary in the MFA. It apparently had inhibiting effects on any individual initiatives from ambassadors and kept their operations on a short leash.

It is very interesting, at this point, to compare the new Chinese foreign service with its Soviet equivalent during the USSR’s early years. Major differences existed in at least three aspects. First, unlike the Soviet Foreign Office, which was pushed to the outer fringes of the power structure, the MFA enjoyed a superior position and monopoly over the conduct of foreign rela-

tions from the outset. In the Soviet case, the Foreign Office had to defend itself on two fronts: the ideological justification for its “capitalist” style of existence in a revolutionary society, and tough competition from such powerful organizations as the Comintern, which was closer to the nerve center of the revolution. The Chinese appeared to be more pragmatic in their perception of the diplomatic establishment and did not reject it as antithetical to the spirit of the revolution.⁷⁶ On the contrary, the MFA had been accorded a privileged position among other government agencies: in charge was Zhou Enlai, who, as a member of the Politburo and Secretariat of the Central Committee and as premier, was second in authority only to Mao.

Second, the PRC diplomats were carefully selected from elite groups in the Party and the army, and so they entertained close and trusted working relationships at the highest level. This was in stark contrast with the Soviet diplomats. The Soviet foreign service, composed of “all sorts of revolutionary riffraff,” languished over scandals and defections, and “the loyalty problem was never completely solved.”⁷⁷ These problems not only caused the diplomats to be held in low esteem within the Party circle, but also contributed to very different security measures from those used by the Chinese; Soviet diplomats were under the tight control and supervision of the secret police.

Third, the foreign environment Chinese diplomats encountered in the early years was more friendly and less stressful than that experienced by the Soviet diplomats. Among nineteen countries with which China had diplomatic relations, eleven were socialist countries, all allies of the PRC. Four were China’s Asian neighbors, and the only four potentially hostile Western European countries were, more or less, traditionally neutral countries. Under these circumstances, the PRC diplomats did not encounter, as the Soviet diplomats did, the tremendous pressure of bridging foreign and domestic realities; at the same time, they avoided the political incredulity often suffered by diplomats accredited to countries with political systems different from their own. These factors contributed to a more disciplined and coherent foreign service with higher morale.

Building Embassies Abroad

Entrusted by Mao and Zhou, and perhaps burdened only by their own inexperience, the seventeen ambassadors soon took their posts. The first job on hand for most of them was to establish their embassies. In those countries that had had diplomatic relations with the former Nationalist government, such as the Soviet Union, the task was simply to take over the old chancery

without much fanfare. For others, establishing an embassy meant literally finding a house and transforming the house into suitable diplomatic quarters. Harsh financial restraints made the task a genuine challenge. In Zhu Lin's *Memoirs of an Ambassador's Wife* are some interesting entries about the physical exhaustion and mental anguish caused by the task.⁷⁸

Yet the more serious challenge for the new ambassadors was to organize their staff into an efficient "country team" by setting up regulations and agendas in the embassy to carry out the primary responsibility of ensuring the pursuit of the government's foreign policy goals. What made the challenge loom even larger for the group was that few of them had clear ideas about the duties of an ambassador. Dean Acheson once described a diplomat's function as to "observe and report to his government all which may concern it and to affect the course of events, so far as he is able to do so, in favor of his own country."⁷⁹ Collecting, analyzing, and reporting information, or in the Chinese term *diaoyan* (investigation and study), were the essential part of the mission for diplomatic envoys, who could not realistically presume to be effective in their jobs without a thorough understanding of local affairs. Unfortunately, it took the PRC ambassadors quite a while to shift their attention to this real focus of their mission.

Indeed, most of the ambassadors initially associated their functions primarily with diplomatic formalities and spent a large amount of time familiarizing themselves with the necessary but not crucial camouflage of their new roles. In these endeavors, the Soviet Union and other East European countries had a preponderant influence on Chinese diplomacy. Wang Jiaxiang, the first PRC ambassador abroad, took the lead in learning from the Soviets. He invited Soviet diplomats and Foreign Ministry officers to give lectures on diplomatic protocol, international laws, and the varieties of diplomatic documents. After each lecture, the embassy sent the transcripts to the MFA, which used them to train young diplomats at home. Soon the embassy in Moscow became an important source of consultation for other PRC ambassadors and their staff, who would stop there en route their posts.⁸⁰

For the ambassadors posted in other countries, the Soviet and other East European embassies provided instant training on the job. Soon after his arrival in Budapest, Huang Zhen, ambassador to Hungary, arranged for the Soviet ambassador to brief his staff. Either unsure of himself or as a friendly gesture, Huang even sent a draft article he wrote for the local newspaper to the Soviet ambassador for advice.⁸¹ Geng Biao, the ambassador to Denmark, once received letters from the former Danish foreign minister and his successor informing him of the change of their positions. Not knowing how to respond, Geng visited the Polish, Romanian, and Soviet embassies one

by one, seeking their advice on the matter before he made a response.⁸² The Chinese embassy in India had its third secretary, Hu Dingyi, who later became the ambassador to Britain, as a liaison officer between the Chinese and the Soviet embassy. The consultations included not only guidance on general diplomatic practice, but also on detailed questions such as which diplomatic functions the Chinese should attend. The Chinese diplomats were extremely nervous at the time not to shake the wrong hands on such occasions. Once, the wife of a senior diplomat in the embassy was reprimanded only because, by bad luck, she shook hands with an American diplomat whom she had not met before.⁸³

Even though the Soviet influence was prevalent in the early 1950s, the Chinese foreign service nevertheless developed a system that in many respects was distinctively different from the Soviet system. As discussed above, the elite status of China's foreign service and the less stressful foreign environment led to some diverse developments. In addition, Zhou Enlai's unfaltering admonitions and the initiatives of ambassadors who in many ways represented the "peer personalities" of this generation further moved the Chinese foreign service into a category of its own.

In historical perspective, the principle of independence and self-reliance had been the cornerstone of the Chinese new diplomacy, although in practice, the principle was constantly subjected to changing circumstances that often eventuated compromises and inconsistencies on the Chinese part. Nevertheless, in the early 1950s, the policy of leaning to one side did not fundamentally compromise that principle, as many contemporary Chinese scholars have argued. From the beginning the MFA, under the guidance of Zhou, attached great importance to that underlying principle. Zhou maintained that the essence of China's new diplomacy was national independence. Political self-determination and economic self-reliance were the basis for Chinese foreign policy making and diplomatic practice. The principle was applicable to both Sino-U.S. relations and Sino-Soviet relations. He made it clear that however useful a reference to Soviet experiences could be, the goal was to develop China's own style of diplomacy.⁸⁴ He reminded his diplomats that China, though a latecomer to the international arena, was nevertheless a big country. Learning from friends was important, but self-confidence and patriotism were crucial in diplomatic exchanges with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. Zhou specified *bubei bukang* (neither servile nor overbearing) as the appropriate attitude for the PRC diplomats in conducting foreign affairs.⁸⁵ Zhou's words and his own practice undoubtedly had tremendous bearing on the Chinese diplomats, who took Zhou as their role model.

The formative experiences of the ambassadors in their earlier years also played a critical part in shaping the new institution of the foreign service. William Strauss and Neil Howe in their book on American generations explain the enduring power of spiritual awakenings: “Whereas a crisis empowers the rising-adult generation, an awakening endows it with a spiritual or ideological mission that stays with its members for life.”⁸⁶ The introduction of Marxism and communism into China was a wake-up call for the first generation of Chinese revolutionaries, who embraced the doctrine in their impressionable youth and came of age in defending it with their lives. What may be seen as the most distinctive trait of this generation is the prevailing disposition and spirit of a “volunteer,” analogous to religious missionaries. Unlike later generations of the Chinese revolution, this generation once lived in a society where they had freedom to choose their beliefs and aspirations. They joined the cause of communism of their own volition and were prepared to sacrifice their personal pursuits in life for the sake of their faith. A sense of mission and the ethos of altruism marked this first generation as one of ideals and high moral values.

The effect of their personalities on the new institution they were helping to build was palpable and overwhelming. A good example was the evolution of the wage system for the PRC diplomats. Before and after 1949, the Chinese government practiced a system of payment in kind, in which the government would provide its employees and their dependents with the primary necessities of life in lieu of cash. In 1951, the embassies abroad, following the Soviet example, changed the system to the regular wage system based on administrative grades, and payment was made in foreign currencies. Yet the embassies were asked to report back suggestions regarding suitable salaries for each grade because living standards varied in the host countries. The figures sent back from the embassies were very modest, and the ambassadors played a key role in curbing their own salaries. Wang Jiaxiang’s wife, years later, wrote, “Not seeking personal privileges, Jiaxiang set his own salary at a very low level, almost as low as the Soviet chauffeurs’ wages. He insisted on paying all living expenditures for me: not only was there no salary for me, but my original payment from the supply system was also canceled.”⁸⁷

This Spartan notion did not stop there. Shocked by the purchasing power in China of their moderate \$500–\$600 monthly salaries, and by the fact that they made more money than Mao and Zhou, the ambassadors were determined to eradicate this extravagance. In 1952, at the first conference of diplomatic envoys, the ambassadors made a strong collective request to abolish the wage system and return to the old supply system on the argument

that their salaries were excessive. The government did not endorse their noble action, but agreed to reduce salary levels. In 1956, at their repeated request, the ambassadors' salaries were reduced again, and low wages became the mode of the system. In 1966, under the prevailing radicalism of the Cultural Revolution, the separate wage system for diplomats abroad was entirely abandoned, and all diplomats were paid the same salaries in renminbi as their domestic counterparts. The MFA was responsible for diplomats' accommodations, transportation, business wardrobes, and other basic necessities when they were stationed abroad. The only residual special treatment for the diplomats was the limited pocket money paid in foreign currencies, which was scaled to four grades of diplomatic personnel in the embassies. This poor financial reward for PRC diplomats continued until the reforms in the MFA in the 1980s.⁸⁸

The personality makeup of the ambassadors also profoundly affected the managerial and operational style of the embassies. Based on their past experiences, some of the ambassadors ran the embassies in the fashion of commanding an army.⁸⁹ The PLA was the model for discipline, hard work, thrift, and comrades-in-arms relations among the staff. Some embassies mobilized their staff to do morning drills, which often attracted curiosity from the local residents. For most of the staff at the time, who were also from military backgrounds, the ordeal was not much of a problem. For some young graduates from universities, the exercise was much more psychological than physical. Even Zhou Enlai, during one of his official visits to foreign countries, commented that the local Chinese embassy looked like a military barracks.

Managing the embassy with industry and thrift was another motif for the first generation. Whereas modern bureaucratic organizations might fight every inch for their perceived fair share of the budget, the Chinese ambassadors of the 1950s ran their embassies on a voluntary code of frugality often to the point of fastidiousness. Several articles in memory of Huang Zhen told a story of soured milk. The embassy's chef was on his way to throw out some milk that had turned sour and ran into Ambassador Huang. When Huang found out his intention, he scolded the chef: "How much millet would this milk be worth! We did not have milk to drink in the past, and now we throw it out in a big pot. How can you face the people?" The story ended with the chef's self-criticism.⁹⁰

Although it was true that the Chinese foreign service was not under the supervision of the secret police, it was very much like the Soviet system in that the Party network played a large role in both the private and professional life of the embassies. The embassy's leadership stressed the fusion of

administrative and Party authority and of private and public life. Zhou Enlai once explained that the Party operated within the government through two channels: Party branches and Party committees.⁹¹ The former was the grassroots cell, and the latter was the leading organ at various levels. In the early years, the embassies had a slightly different version of the Party network. Instead of a Party committee at the top, embassies adopted a responsibility system with the chief of mission at the top under whom a chancery committee (*guan wei hui*) was responsible for collective decision making. Ambassadors and most senior diplomats were the members of the committee, and all the important decisions were the results of the committee discussion. At the same time, ambassadors were also the secretaries of Party branches, assisted by other diplomats. For instance, Ambassador Huang Zhen was the Party secretary, a military attaché was the deputy secretary, and Huang's wife and other two midrank diplomats were the members of the branch committee in charge of personnel, women and youth, and propaganda.⁹² Party branches generally focused on ideological indoctrination, enforcement of discipline, and mass mobilization. Under the circumstances of embassy life, Party branches played one more important function: monitoring staff members' conduct and ideological inclination. The regular branch meetings often exhorted a confessional style of self-criticism as a mechanism of self-checking. The branch committee members, acting as ideological and disciplinary guardians, were responsible for exposing anything that they considered objectionable. Huang's wife, Zhu Lin, a zealous Party-life enforcer, proudly recorded in her book how she uncovered and handled some straying staff members in the embassy.⁹³ There was little doubt that amid the revolutionary impetuosity of the early years, the Party network had an iron grip on embassy life, a grip that ensured a disciplined and politically reliable team abroad for the CCP.

As for the ambassadorial double authority in the embassy, there may have been a historical rationale. Mao introduced the first Chinese ambassador, Wang Jiaxiang, to Stalin not only as ambassador in charge of diplomatic relations between the two countries, but also as the representative of the CCP Central Committee, responsible for "maintain[ing] contacts on questions concerning links between the two Parties."⁹⁴ But Wang was exceptional in terms of both his political status and the state of Sino-Soviet relations at the time. What is not clear is whether before the establishment of the International Liaison Department of the CCP Central Committee in 1951, the PRC ambassadors accredited to other socialist countries were also assigned responsibility for Party relations with these countries. In retrospect, however, it appears that the ambassador was made Party secretary

more for purposes of internal management than for Party relations. In addition, the Party secretary position provided the ambassadors, with their indisputable political experience and achievements, a political authority over their staffs, which often compensated for their lack of professional expertise.⁹⁵

A Measured First Step

Some studies on diplomats point out that the social and cultural milieu to which diplomats are exposed, including socialization with their host countries and colleagues in the diplomatic corps, has a great influence on diplomats' policy perspectives and, particularly, their image of the host countries.⁹⁶ The PRC diplomats were no exceptions. At the same time, for the fledgling PRC diplomats the process of socialization also paralleled the process of professional learning. From diplomatic procedures, common practices, and rules to formal etiquette, the PRC diplomats started to accumulate personal experience, consciously or unconsciously, that slowly but surely formed the institutional culture of the Chinese foreign service. For the first generation of PRC ambassadors, however, this process of learning was notably slow. Aside from subjective reasons like intentional resistance to alien influences, the fact was that the diplomatic careers of many ambassadors did not last very long. Among the seventeen ambassadors, ten left the foreign service after their first term. Among the remaining seven, only two, Wang Youping and Han Nianlong, retired from the MFA as former foreign service officers. The other five, Huang Zhen, Yao Zhongming, Geng Biao, Ji Pengfei, and Zeng Yongquan, after serving for various lengths of time at the MFA, were either promoted to the central government or transferred to senior positions in other ministries in the 1970s. For most of them, ambassadorial experiences were just another milestone in their long and extraordinary political careers. Their calling in life was to fight for the revolution, and serving as ambassadors was just another expression of the same endeavor.

The learning process of this generation was also considerably held back by the subpar professional quality of the recruits. As Han Nianlong put it, "Most of the ambassadors in the first group did not understand foreign languages, and had no knowledge in international relations. To us, diplomacy was something too new, too unfamiliar, and too difficult."⁹⁷ The rudimentary average educational level, abysmal ignorance of world affairs, insufficient professional training, and absence of clear understanding of diplomacy not only created a group of baffled ambassadors but also doubled or even

tripled the MFA's difficulties in transforming the group into professionals. In 1952, Zhou felt it imperative to call back all the ambassadors and give them a refresher course in diplomacy. He not only lectured the ambassadors on China's foreign policies, but also stipulated a civil code for the ambassadors, which specified that ambassadors' "action should conform with policy, behavior with diplomatic status, language with propriety, and manners with convention."⁹⁸

The last of this first generation departed from active life in the foreign service in the early 1980s. The legacy they left in the foreign service is a mixed one. On one hand, they helped to build from scratch a highly centralized, disciplined, and politically cohesive institution to carry out the foreign policy of the PRC in the early years. On the other, their shared values and political outlook were institutionalized and translated into rigid codes of behavior for later generations; in many ways, these codes became ideological and cultural hindrances to the further professionalization of the PRC foreign service.

If professional knowledge, a sense of professional community, and professional autonomy marked the diplomatic profession as in other professions, the practices of this first generation of PRC ambassadors indicated that they had taken a very different path. Instead of professional expertise, they stressed political correctness. Instead of professional commitment, they stressed class and ideological identification. Instead of independent analysis and problem solving, they stressed discipline and compliance. Without question, the first generation provided the least qualified ambassadors from a professional point of view. Yet it was precisely for their political loyalties rather than professional qualities that this group was chosen for the job: building a foreign service that would serve both the national interests and the interests of the Chinese revolution. The first generation of ambassadors was uniquely prepared for that task.