

Characteristics of China's Policy Towards the Three Indochina Countries (1949-1954)

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ABSTRACT: After the establishment of the People's Republic of China (1949) and its alignment with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, China provided aid to the revolutionary movements in the three Indochina countries. This support significantly strengthened the organization, enhanced the military and political capabilities of the revolutionary forces in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, and increased their international standing. However, Chinese aid stemmed not only from a proletarian internationalist stance as officially stated. However, it was also closely tied to Beijing's strategic interests, including the need to ensure national security, assert its role in the international communist movement, and establish a stabilizing belt on its southern flank to facilitate domestic economic recovery and development. By employing historical and logical methods, this article identifies the characteristics of China's policy towards the three Indochina countries during the period 1949-1954. These characteristics provide valuable reference points for the three Indochina nations in the current context, as China continues to increase its influence in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. A thorough understanding of the motives, methods, and consequences of China's policies during the 1949–1954 period can inform strategic considerations for countries in the region, enabling them to capitalize on opportunities for cooperation while mitigating adverse impacts on their relations with China.

KEYWORDS: Cambodia; China; Laos; Indochina; Policy; Vietnam

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout ancient and medieval history, China generally viewed Indochina as being within its traditional sphere of influence. Relations between China and countries in this region were often shaped within a hierarchical regional order, influenced by the "celestial empire–vassal states" model. This approach reflects the characteristic political and cultural thinking of traditional China, which regards neighboring countries as entities within a China-led central-peripheral power structure. However, towards the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, the development of capitalism into the imperialist stage profoundly altered the regional and international landscape. The wave of invasion, division, and colonial exploitation by Western powers led both China and the three Indochina countries, due to various objective and subjective reasons, to become targets of colonial rule. In this context, the similarities in historical circumstances contributed to a shift in China's perception of Indochina: from viewing it as a "buffer zone" or "vassal state" to an approach of empathy and solidarity in the struggle against colonialism. This change in the historical-political environment and strategic thinking provided the basis for China to increase its support for the revolutionary movements in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. That aid was crucial in strengthening the revolutionary forces, helping create a new balance of power that forced the French colonialists to participate in negotiations at the Geneva Conference in 1954 to end the Indochina War. However, alongside its positive impacts, China's support for the three Indochina countries was also linked to its own strategic limitations and calculations, reflecting the intertwining of ideological factors and national interests. Based on an analysis of these characteristics, it is possible to identify better the nature and methods of implementing China's policy towards the three Indochina countries in the specific historical context of the first half of the 20th century.

2. SOURCES AND RESEARCH METHODS

To write this article, the author uses documents from the National Archives Center III of Vietnam. In addition, the data cited are from reputable publications, such as those from the General Department of Logistics of the Ministry of National Defense of Vietnam. Regarding methodology, the article applies the historical method to examine China's foreign policy throughout its more than 4,000-year history, as well as the relationship between the people of the three Indochina countries since the French colonial invasion and the shared destiny of these three countries. The following features characterized the International relations in Indochina during the period from 1949 to 1954:

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3. RESEARCH RESULTS

Emerging during the Cold War, China developed its foreign policy in response to pressing domestic and external needs. Domestically, this involved stabilizing the economic, political, and social situation after years of unequal treaties imposed by Western colonialism and civil war. Foreignly, it involved seeking a suitable strategy amid fierce competition between the capitalist and socialist blocs. China's policy towards Indochina during the period from 1949 to 1954 is notable for the following characteristics.

3.1 Combining Ideological Issues with National Interests

It can be argued that international relations during the period 1949–1954 were profoundly shaped by ideological factors, particularly the confrontation between capitalism and socialism, which emerged as a defining feature of the post-World War II international order:

During the period from 1947 to 1949, the bipolar system's power accumulated and consolidated, and the Cold War raged across all political, economic, and military spheres. The increasingly fierce confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union certainly had a profound impact on countries around the world. The United States and the Soviet Union divided their spheres of influence, drawing all countries in the world into the competition between the US and the Soviet Union (Pan Yining, 2011, p. 16). Both blocs sought to draw countries to their side through economic aid programs, the establishment of military alliances, and intensified intervention in each other's spheres of influence. The Korean War (1950–1953), with the direct participation of both blocs, is a typical example of a hot war in a cold world. In newly emerging socialist countries, in a context of economic and military weakness, ideology played a role within national interests, contributing to consolidating the position of the ruling Communist Party and strengthening its ability to defend itself against attacks from capitalist countries. Therefore, ideology became the catalyst that united the countries in the socialist bloc, thereby building cooperative relations and solidarity in the struggle against imperialism. Meanwhile, on the capitalist side, in the 1950s and 1960s, the United States used its influence wherever possible to prevent diplomatic relations between the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and other non-communist countries. In his memoirs, Nixon described it as follows:

In the spring of 1950, after a period of hesitation, the State Department proposed aid to France and allied nations to fight against Ho Chi Minh's resistance, which China and the Soviet Union then supported. The aid was limited to economic aid and included military aid, and would not lead to our own military intervention. If Chinese or Soviet forces directly intervened, then it would be reconsidered. (Peter A. Puler, 1987, p. 31).

This international context explained China's decision to lean heavily toward the Soviet Union, officially joining the ranks of socialist countries and supporting the national liberation struggle in Indochina. However, during this period, China's policy was not entirely ideological; centrifugal tendencies within each bloc had begun to emerge.

On the capitalist side, Britain, France, and other Western countries began openly opposing the United States' dominant role in certain strategic issues.

According to declassified documents from the US Department of Defense, by the time of the Geneva Accords in 1954, the United States had provided approximately \$2.6 billion in aid to the war in Indochina, demonstrating France's increasing dependence on American resources (US Department of Defense, 1971/2011, p. 15). Despite receiving significant aid, France remained cautious about the internationalization of the war; US policy documents record efforts to prevent bringing the Indochina issue to the United Nations, reflecting France's concern that the conflict would become a Korean War (US Department of Defense, 1971/2011, pp. A-2).

Meanwhile, on the socialist side, Yugoslavia was accused of its ruling Communist Party deviating from Marxism-Leninism, indicating that Yugoslavia did not accept Moscow's absolute leadership (Communist Information Bureau, 1948); in 1950, China and the Soviet Union signed a Treaty of Mutual Assistance, establishing a military alliance, but not placing China under Soviet command. The relationship was one of "alliance," not "subordination." China retained its independent role in military action (Government of the People's Republic of China & Government of the USSR. (1950, February 14).

Another factor that made China even more cautious about continuing deep intervention stemmed from the Soviet Union's actions in the Korean War. Moscow prioritized its own security interests, refusing to send troops and tending to abandon its ally North Korea at a crucial moment. This experience forced China to reassess its alliance relationship and seek independence in regional policymaking, especially in Indochina. In fact, while aligned with the Soviet Union, China secretly pursued plans to gradually reduce its dependence, creating a separate space for its foreign policy.

This centrifugal trend demonstrates that national interests remain the key factor governing countries' actions, whether in capitalist or socialist systems. However, Vietnam's allies, the Soviet Union and China, had their own strategic interests. For China, that was protection. guarantee a

China's approach to the Indochina issue was to secure southern China, prevent American intervention, and create a peaceful environment for national recovery and development after years of war and civil conflict.

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China's fundamental approach to the Indochina issue was to prevent the internationalization of this conflict as had happened in Korea. ...The Chinese Prime Minister declared: We have lost too many people in Korea - that war has cost us dearly. We are not in a position to engage in another war at this time (Qiang Zhai, 1994, p. 140).

For the Soviet Union at that time, its priority was Europe, not Asia. The Soviet goal was to prevent France from joining the European Mutual Defense Treaty. Another goal was to prevent the war from spreading into Indochina, thus preventing China from sending troops there, as had happened in Korea. Because if war broke out, the Soviet Union would have a responsibility to support China. Therefore, the actions of the Soviet Union and China in Indochina had to be extremely calculated and considered:

Besides having limited interests in Southeast Asia, Moscow also wanted to encourage France to reject the European Defence Community (EDC). Mendès-France was a fierce opponent of the EDC, and his continued tenure would reduce the likelihood that the French would accept it. For the Soviet leadership, the opportunity to sabotage Germany's rearmament plan was clearly more important than maintaining a communist war in Indochina (Qiang Zhai, 1994, p. 140).

Because of these self-serving calculations, when providing aid to the Dien Bien Phu campaign, China and the Soviet Union also sought to ensure that the Viet Minh forces would not achieve an overwhelming victory, but only a sufficient one.

Both China and the Soviet Union provided limited aid during the decisive phase of the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, their view being that the Viet Minh should only achieve a "moderate" victory – enough to negotiate, but not enough to alter the regional balance of power to the point of provoking American military intervention. Although Moscow appeared more moderate than Beijing on the Indochina issue, both countries shared a common desire to end the war in the region. Overall, they maintained close consultation and cooperation throughout this period. Together, they exerted a restraining influence over the Viet Minh. In this case, their national interests outweighed their ideological obligation to support another communist party's struggle. (Hood, S.J., 2015, p. 152)

Commenting on China's policy, Rogers & Francis Elmo also wrote that:

At least in the Indochina region, China's foreign policy is cautious, pragmatic, and flexible. When necessary, the Chinese leadership will not hesitate to adopt a pragmatic political approach (realpolitik), especially when dealing with the United States and the Soviet Union. (Rogers & Francis Elmo, 1966, p. 3)

The comments of Hood, S.J., Rogers, and Francis Elmo fully reflected the calculations of Soviet and Chinese interests regarding the Indochina War.

3.2 China's Comprehensive Aid Policy: Both Assisting and Influencing

In the history of international relations in Asia during the latter half of the 20th century, the period 1949–1954 holds a critical position, linked to the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the climax of the First Indochina War. In the context of the emerging and spreading Cold War, international aid became a crucial foreign policy tool for major powers to expand their influence, ensure security, and shape regional order. For China, a newly established socialist state, economically impoverished but with urgent needs for security and international standing, its aid policy towards the three Indochina countries was a key pillar of its early foreign policy.

After winning the civil war and establishing the People's Republic of China in October 1949, China faced a series of serious challenges: a depleted economy, weak infrastructure, diplomatic isolation, and security pressure from Western powers. In this context, China could not compete with the United States or the Soviet Union solely through economic or military strength, so it used revolutionary aid as an effective, low-cost, yet strategically impactful foreign policy tool.

Military aid was the most important pillar of China's aid policy towards Indochina, especially towards Vietnam.

According to official Vietnamese statistics, by the end of 1950, Vietnam had received 3,983 tons of aid from China (General Department of Logistics, 1985, p. 146). This aid included 1,020 tons of weapons and ammunition (including weapons brought back by Vietnamese units trained in China), 161 tons of military supplies, 20 tons of medicine and medical equipment, 71 tons of military uniforms, 30 transport vehicles carrying Molotov cocktails, and 2,634 tons of rice (Institute of Military History, 1994, p. 542).

This aid helped the Viet Minh forces transition from guerrilla warfare to conventional warfare, creating the conditions for decisive victories.

Training and Advisory Aid

Immediately after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, President Ho Chi Minh requested that China send an advisory delegation to support Vietnam. The Chinese side agreed and provided a list of four key leaders: Luo Guiba, a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, was appointed head of the advisory delegation; Wei Guoqing was appointed chief military advisor; Mai Jiasheng served as an advisor for the General Staff's operations; and Ma Xifu served as a logistics advisor. In addition to sending military and political advisors to Vietnam, China also accepted and trained Vietnamese cadres at training facilities on Chinese territory.

By June 1950, China had trained 3,100 Vietnamese cadres at the intermediate and basic levels in areas such as infantry command, artillery, and engineering (Ministry of National Defense, Vol. 1, p. 451)

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The training content was not limited to military technology, but also included: military organization, political work, and rear-area development. For Laos and Cambodia, training was primarily conducted through Vietnam, reflecting the indirect nature of China's aid policy.

In 1951, the Vietnamese government agreed with the Chinese government to open two training facilities in China for Vietnam – the campus in Nanning and the cadet school in Lushan. Several Vietnamese military officers, including Major Generals Ho Sy Liem, Pham Dan, and Ho Sy Hau, graduated from these facilities, providing the Vietnamese army with a timely supply of workforce (Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences.2014.p. 371).

Furthermore, in the context of Vietnam's war, to ensure that the education of Vietnamese children was not interrupted and to create a workforce for the country, China provided support to help Vietnam open schools. Vietnam was responsible for the educational content, while China provided the facilities.

Political and Organizational Aid

China's aid also manifested in supporting the construction of revolutionary political organizations in Indochina. China disseminated experience in Party building, organizing the national united front, and managing liberated areas, contributing to consolidating the political foundation for the resistance movements.

From mid-1951, following suggestions from Chinese advisors, the Vietnamese resistance government accelerated the streamlining of personnel to save budget and improve the efficiency of management and administration.

Accordingly, Comrade Luo Guiba of China proposed issues related to personnel:

Implementing a unified personnel structure for agencies and organizations. The Central Committee creates a unified organizational structure, or the Central Committee stipulates the principles and scope of the organizational structure (local areas may expand or narrow it to suit the circumstances of the struggle and the needs of their work, within the general principles and scope set by the Central Committee) (National Political Bureau III, Prime Minister's Archives No. 1044)

Diplomatic Support

China's diplomatic recognition of Vietnam before the Soviet Union recognized the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was considered an exception in relations between socialist countries at the time. Because, within the socialist bloc at that time, there was an unwritten convention that the Soviet Union had to establish diplomatic relations with a country before other countries could. However, in the case of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, China broke the convention and was the first country to recognize and establish diplomatic relations with it. Only after China recognized Vietnam did the Soviet Union and other socialist countries recognize Vietnam.

China became the first country in the world to recognize and establish diplomatic relations with Vietnam five years after its founding. At the same time, Vietnam was the first Southeast Asian country to recognize and establish diplomatic relations with China. A year later, the two countries decided to commemorate the diplomatic victory on the day of establishing diplomatic relations. Establishing diplomatic relations was a significant event in the relationship between the two countries.

China played a crucial role in breaking the diplomatic isolation of the Indochina resistance forces, especially the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. China's recognition and support of Vietnam on the international stage created an important political basis for Vietnam's diplomatic activities.

Vietnam was the recipient of the largest and most comprehensive direct aid from China. This aid reflects Vietnam's central role in China's Indochina strategy. For Laos and Cambodia, Chinese aid was primarily indirect, channeled through Vietnam and within the framework of the Vietnam-Cambodia-Laos Alliance. The level of aid was more limited, reflecting China's strategic calculations in allocating resources and controlling the extent of its involvement. Wilfred Burchett noted Vietnam's role in Cambodia and Laos:

"It is undeniable that the Vietnamese resistance forces bore the majority of the burden of the war." The struggle. The French (and later the Americans) viewed Indochina as a single battlefield, and Ho Chi Minh, Vo Nguyen Giap, and their fellow leaders were compelled to adopt the same perspective. However, in their approach, they greatly respected the nationalist sentiments of their Cambodian and Laotian allies and helped them gain their independence and sovereignty. Although the main fighting force in all three countries was Vietnamese, in Cambodia and Laos, they still fought within the Khmer Issarak and Lao Issara organizations. (Wilfred Burchett, 1986, p. 29)

However, China's aid to the three Indochina countries was not entirely selfless; it involved both assistance and binding conditions. China's assistance to Indochina was motivated less by pure solidarity than by its own strategic and security interests. Beijing sought to block the expansion of American influence in Indochina and to transform the region into a neutral buffer zone favorable to China's security. This strategic calculation also shaped China's conduct at the 1954 Geneva Conference, where Beijing sought to influence the course of negotiations to serve its interests best. A clear example was the issue of representation for the Pathet Lao and Khmer Issarak forces. Although Prime Minister Pham Van Dong initially proposed that their representatives should participate, Zhou Enlai eventually persuaded him to adopt a more pragmatic approach and not raise the matter at the plenary sessions. As a result, the issue was effectively sidelined and confined to a subcommittee (Burchett, 1986, p. 38).

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Regarding the Pathet Lao's regrouping zone, Zhou Enlai supported its establishment, but he arranged it in a way that served China's security interests rather than the interests of the Lao revolution (Burchett, 1986, p. 38)

This meant that the Lao revolutionary forces had to withdraw from their strongholds in 10 provinces of Laos and regroup in two northern areas: Phongsali and Sam Neua. Prime Minister Zhou Enlai explained that this would give North Vietnam a common border with Laos and, therefore, a "buffer zone." However, this meant that the Pathet Lao would have to abandon their most important base areas, abandoning the people who had faithfully supported their armed struggle for many years.

In an exchange with the author of the book "The China-Vietnam-Cambodia Triangle," a Vietnamese leader shared:

"For us, the issue is not the buffer zones. The issue is the whole of Laos, its unity and independence, and the preservation of the bases to ensure ultimate victory. Independence, unity, sovereignty, territorial integrity—that is our slogan. We have done everything to ensure these principles are accepted, and we will never abandon that position." (Wilfred Burchett, 1986, p. 39)

But China's perspective on the Laos and Cambodia issue:

Regarding the Laos and Cambodia issue, Zhou Enlai believed the approach needed to differ from Vietnam's. Vietnam relies on its own efforts to advance, which is essentially neo-democracy. Nevertheless, Laos and Cambodia are not like that; for now, they only need freedom, democracy, and independence, which would be wonderful. The important thing was to prevent them from leaning towards imperialism and to maintain neutrality (Past & Present Magazine, Liều Châu, No. 289, August 2007, p. 16).

This is consistent with Burchett's observation: "Zhou Enlai made it clear to the French that China came to Geneva primarily to protect its own interests, not the interests of the revolutionary forces of Indochina" (Wilfred Burchett, 1986, p. 42).

These are proofs that China's aid and assistance to the three Indochina countries were both helpful and binding, and this significantly affected the national liberation struggle of the people of the three Indochina countries.

This had a significant impact on the national liberation struggle of the people of the three Indochina countries: Because of the betrayals in Geneva, our struggle had to be extended by another 20 years; Our experiences in military, political, and diplomatic affairs have proven one thing: absolute independence is essential (Wilfred Burchett, 1986, p. 54).

Moreover, this is the lesson that later, when conducting negotiations at the Paris Conference, Vietnam proactively decided its own destiny without letting China do it for it.

3.3 China uses Vietnam as a hub to influence Laos and Cambodia

The rule of French colonialism placed the people of the three Indochina countries in a shared historical destiny. The French invasion and imposition of rule over Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, and the forced annexation of the three countries into a single entity called French Indochina, according to the decree signed on October 17, 1887, and the decree of April 19, 1899, by the French president, broke the national character of each country (National Political Document III, 2026).

This implicitly created a natural bond between the three nations of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia in their respective struggles for independence:

Indochina was a battlefield, with Vietnam as the main theater, while Laos and Cambodia were strategically important battlefields. To conquer these countries, the enemy had to. I controlled and divided the remaining two countries, progressing towards annexing all of Indochina, setting up a puppet army and government apparatus, and imposing its rule on all three countries (Nguyen Van Nhat; Tran Duc Cuong; Nguyen Trong Phuc. 2014. p. 401)

Cooperation among the three Indochina countries was most clearly demonstrated through the leadership of the Indochina Communist Party. In October 1930, the first Central Committee meeting of the Party adopted the Political Thesis compiled by Comrade Tran Phu and renamed the Party the Indochina Communist Party. The thesis identifies Indochina as a part of the world revolution – the main enemy of the Indochina people is also part of the common enemy of oppressed peoples and the world proletariat. Therefore, the Indochina revolution, being a part of the world revolution, must maintain contact with the proletarian and national liberation movements of other countries:

Currently, Indochina has brought its revolutionary forces into the massive struggle worldwide, expanding the worker-peasant front against imperialism. Therefore, the world revolution and the Indochina revolution are closely related (Communist Party of Vietnam, 1998, pp. 88-99). Especially regarding the Chinese Communist Party, the Indochina Communist Party considers the successes and failures of the Chinese revolution to be its own. The Indochina Communist Party had emphasized this idea in a letter from its First Party Congress (February 1935) to the Chinese Communist Party: "The victory of the Chinese revolution will greatly influence the development of the Indochina revolution, so supporting the Chinese revolution is supporting the Indochina revolution. Therefore, we will do our utmost to mobilize the working masses of Indochina, using all methods of struggle to support the Chinese revolution" (Nguyen Ngoc Tuyen, 1959, p. 11).

China's assistance to the three Indochina countries was affirmed by President Ho Chi Minh when he mentioned that Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai had come to Liuzhou to discuss the Geneva issue:

"Comrade Zhou Enlai not only fought at the Geneva Conference, but also came to Liuzhou to report, speaking very thoroughly. We are very grateful!" Since the founding of the Indochina Communist Party, it has received assistance from the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and from Comrade Zhou Enlai for the past 30 years. At this conference, the comrades provided

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excellent additional support, which I agree with; I must also express my gratitude for the various forms of assistance from the comrades in Guangxi. (Duong Danh Dy. 2005. pp. 434-452)

However, China's support for the three Indochina countries was different. For Vietnam, it was direct, but for Cambodia and Laos, it was indirect, channeled through Vietnam. Although from 1950 onwards, China began to focus its military aid, advisors, and training on the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, cooperation between Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia had already been formed and developed in earlier stages.

Shortly after Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia gained independence, the French colonialists returned to invade all three Indochina countries.

They sought to re-establish their rule over all three countries by exploiting the people and territory of one against another, systematically dividing and isolating each country, and undermining the alliance among Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia in order to restore their domination in Indochina.

To meet the objective demands of the struggle for independence and freedom of each country and to uphold the fine historical traditions between the three nations, the Party, State, army, and people of Vietnam strengthened solidarity and alliance with the revolutionary forces and people of Laos and Cambodia in the war against the common enemy. Immediately after the outbreak of the war, on October 30, 1945, the Military Alliance Agreement between the Government of Vietnam and the Government of Laos, was signed. Along with this agreement, a decision was also made to establish the Lao-Vietnamese Joint Forces.

By the end of 1945, representatives of the Vietnamese government, together with the Cambodian Independence Committee, signed a joint declaration on Vietnamese-Cambodian-Lao solidarity against the French. In early 1946, in southeastern Cambodia, the Vietnamese army, along with Cambodian patriotic forces, developed a combined Cambodian-Vietnamese armed force operating in the provinces of Prey Veng, Xoai Rieng, Kang Dan, and several other neighboring areas.

From 1947 onwards, Vietnam successively dispatched volunteer units to fight alongside the Lao-Vietnamese Joint Forces, the Cambodian-Vietnamese Joint Forces, the Itsala Liberation Army of Laos, and the Itsarak Army of Cambodia, thereby creating increasingly favorable conditions in both countries for the common struggle of the three nations against a shared enemy.

In Laos, the presence of Vietnamese cadres, advisors, and forces during the period 1949–1954 was significant. Vietnam supported the training and organization of the Laotian resistance forces, while also coordinating military efforts to disperse French forces and expand strategic territory.

Compared to Laos, Vietnam's influence in Cambodia during this period was somewhat more limited due to differences in socio-political context and ethnic composition. However, in the northeastern regions of Cambodia bordering Vietnam and Laos, Vietnam still played an important role. China supported the Khmer resistance forces against the French. These activities took place mainly through the Central Highlands – Lower Laos – Northeast Cambodia corridor. Combining national and international tasks in Laos and Cambodia: In March 1951, at the Conference of the People's Alliance of the three Indochina countries, the Vietnam-Laos-Cambodia People's Alliance was also established based on the principles of voluntariness, equality, mutual assistance, and respect for the sovereignty of each country. The birth of the fighting alliance among the people of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia had special political significance, not only uniting the three Indochina countries into a single unified front, but also symbolizing victory over the "divide and conquer" policy of French colonialism.

Through the solidarity of the Vietnam-Cambodia-Laos alliance, it is clear that China did not directly provide large-scale aid to Laos and Cambodia; instead, it "pumped" capacity into Vietnam, making Vietnam the agent of influence in the Indochina space.

In 1952, the French deployed 237 battalions in Indochina. Of the 54 combat battalions, 50 were stationed in Vietnam, while the remaining 4 were in the North. Of the 179 pacification battalions, 30 were deployed in Laos and Cambodia, whereas 149 were stationed in Vietnam, including 61 in the North. Within a year, the number of combat battalions had increased to 80, of which 71 were in Vietnam and 9 in Laos. By March 1953, in Cambodia, there were only 2 French pacification battalions and 5 battalions of the Royal Khmer Army under French command. The victories of the Viet Minh on the battlefields of Vietnam and Laos were the main factors that created the conditions for Cambodia's independence from the monarchy in late 1953 (Wilfred Burchett, 1986, p. 30).

China did not directly aid Laos and Cambodia because, despite its strong motives, it was well aware of its limitations. Its economy, still devastated after the civil war, coupled with the risk of escalating conflict with the United States, forced Beijing to choose an indirect intervention model. Vietnam thus became the ideal "intermediate partner": geographically close enough, organizationally strong enough, and legitimate enough to take the lead in the Indochina war. Strategic investment in Vietnam yielded the highest efficiency, directly weakening the French colonial system while indirectly creating conditions for its influence to spread to Laos and Cambodia through Vietnam's existing channels.

3.4 China's Policy Towards the Three Indochina Countries Was Dominated by the Trend Towards Détente in International Relations

The international situation during the period 1949–1954 showed that actors in international politics mainly resorted to conflict to resolve disagreements. However, from 1953 onwards, the international context shifted towards détente. The death of Stalin in March

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1953 marked a significant turning point in the Soviet Union's foreign policy, leading to a widespread trend of "peaceful coexistence" in international relations among major powers. In this context, China also began to reconsider its hardline stance, moving towards a more flexible foreign policy to avoid the risk of confrontation with the United States, while simultaneously seizing international opportunities to consolidate its position. This international trend towards détente directly influenced China's foreign policy, particularly its approach to the Indochina issue.

Regarding diplomacy, Zhou Enlai stated that, after successfully overcoming the challenges of the Korean War, China should integrate into the global diplomatic system. China's policy was to coexist peacefully, maintain good relations with all countries, and develop friendly relations with other nations. (Pan Yining, 2011, p. 36)

Therefore, China strived to guide the Indochina countries towards a peaceful approach. At the Liuzhou Conference (July 1954), the word "peace" was repeatedly emphasized by Prime Minister Zhou Enlai in his talks with President Ho Chi Minh and Prime Minister Pham Van Dong.

The Viet Minh made significant sacrifices in accepting the Geneva Accords. However, they created the impression that they had voluntarily accepted those sacrifices for the sake of the prevailing path of peaceful coexistence in the socialist world (Wilfred Burchett, 1986, p. 53).

The peaceful trend was also reflected in China's stance on the issue of the Chinese diaspora. Although after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, China had implemented a policy to protect overseas Chinese, it was not until 1954 that China first raised the issue of Chinese nationality and demanded that overseas Chinese respect the laws of their country of residence.

3.5 China's Policy Influenced by the Characteristics of its Leaders

One of the key characteristics of China's policy towards the three Indochina countries was the influence of Chinese leaders. During the period 1949-1954, key leaders in China, such as Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Liu Shaoqi, and Zhu De, maintained close relationships with Vietnamese leaders, including President Ho Chi Minh, General Vo Nguyen Giap, and Prime Minister Pham Van Dong. This close relationship contributed to the unity of the national liberation struggle and to China's enthusiastic support. The Vietnamese revolution and Vietnamese patriots had an early relationship with the Chinese revolution and Chinese communists. Prime Minister Zhou Enlai once said about his relationship with President Ho Chi Minh: "Thirty years ago in Paris, I met President Ho Chi Minh. President Ho Chi Minh was my guide. At that time, President Ho Chi Minh was a true Marxist, and I had just started to join the Communist Party. President Ho Chi Minh was my elder brother" (Nguyen Thi Phuong Hoa. No. 9 (109). 2010. p.30)

From the 1920s, Guangzhou became a refuge and operational base for many Vietnamese patriots, including Le Hong Phong, Ho Tung Mau, Le Hong Son, Pham Hong Thai, and Phung Chi Kien. In particular, Nguyen Ai Quoc received tremendous support from the people and revolutionary cadres of China during his activities there. Many other locations such as Hong Kong, Shanghai, Macau, Kunming, and Guangxi. were also places where the first revolutionary organizations of Vietnam were formed and headquartered, notably the Tam Tam Society (1923), the Vietnam Youth Revolutionary Association (June 1925), the Communist Party of Vietnam (February 1930), and the Party's Foreign Affairs Steering Committee (April 1934). In particular, the first Congress of the Indochina Communist Party was held here on March 3, 1934.

Speaking about the relationship with China, President Ho Chi Minh, who played a key role in fostering friendship between the two nations, once emphasized: "China and Vietnam are two brotherly countries. The relationship is very close. The two nations have been linked for thousands of years through culture, history, politics, and economics. (1995), Volume 4, p. 103)

These factors contributed to China's willingness to help the revolutions in the three Indochina countries.

3.6 Traditional Influence of China on the Indochina Region

The balance of power and the skillful strategies adopted by neighboring countries often constrained the expansionist policies of the Han people and the hegemonic ideology of the imperial court.

During the Middle Ages, great powers often relied on the right of conquest, considering force as the supreme law. However, since the emergence of the modern concept of the state, relations between countries have gradually been regulated by international law and the principle of non-use or threat of force. As a result, the risk of large countries launching wars of aggression against smaller countries has been, to some extent, constrained by law, thereby helping maintain greater peace and stability.

However, the custom of large countries using force existed for thousands of years before humanity progressed to understand the value of force. Justice and law—how can they not leave behind nostalgia, a touch of regret, in the political circles or in any country? (Luu Van Loi, 2000, p. 347).

Joay-o, who conducted extensive research on the daily work of the Geneva Conference and its consequences, found that China's attitude in Geneva was consistent with its traditional policy, whether under imperial, republican, or socialist regimes. That attitude was utterly alien to any concept of proletarian internationalism and revolutionary solidarity. Such actions were utterly unworthy of the price paid by the people of Vietnam, Laos, and the Khmer people. Joay-o wrote:

Let us try to answer this question. Was China's policy towards Indochina in 1954 close to the traditional policy of the Chinese empire in this region?

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One of the most striking features of that policy is that China consistently seeks to maintain peace on its southern flank by establishing a balance based on rivalry among the various countries in the region. A "Chinese-style peace" (*pax sinica*) is like neutralizing opposing forces. A policy very close to the ancient "divide and conquer" policy in its most rudimentary form, content with resisting any attempt to disrupt the balance and force direct intervention. To that end, the ancient empire always sought to maintain harmony in relations with its most powerful neighbors, while simultaneously maintaining, as much as possible, direct relations with its smaller and weaker neighbors (Burchett, W.1986. tr.51-52).

Although in the modern era China and the three Indochina countries share a common destiny, China's policy towards them still bears the hallmarks of a celestial empire towards its vassals. That is how China decided to participate in the Geneva Conference and informed Vietnam to prepare; that it conducted negotiations on behalf of the Vietnamese people, decided on core issues; and that is how it viewed China as a model in the national liberation movements in colonial countries semi-colonial.

4. CONCLUSION

A range of factors influenced China's policy toward the three Indochina countries during the period 1949–1954. Among them, the external factor – specifically the ideological factor – played a vital role. From its inception, the People's Republic of China recognized the urgent need for a peaceful environment for national development, including expanding relations with countries around the world, especially in the field of science and technology with the West. However, the Cold War context forced China to choose sides while simultaneously shouldering the responsibility of supporting the worldwide proletarian revolutionary movement as an international mission. Nevertheless, the most decisive factor in China's policy actions remained national interest. This explains China's active support for the revolutionary movements in the three Indochina countries, its participation in the Geneva Conference's resolution of the issue, and the gradual shift in its policy towards the end of 1954. Furthermore, China's policy during this period reflected a long-standing tradition – specifically, the relationship between a large and a small country, resembling the historical "patriarchal-subordinate" relationship. In addition, the personal relationships between Chinese and Vietnamese leaders significantly influenced Beijing's foreign policy toward Indochina.

While this policy was not entirely positive or negative, China's assistance provided certain advantages to the people of the three Indochina countries. However, it also placed them in a position to bear long-term consequences, particularly sowing the seeds for future rifts in relations.

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