

# Communism in Thailand as a transnational revolution and the influence of China's foreign policy

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**Cui Feng**

National University of Singapore, Singapore

[cui.feng@u.nus.edu](mailto:cui.feng@u.nus.edu)

## Abstract

Thailand/Siam was one of the earliest areas where Chinese and Vietnamese communists carried out activities due to its geographical advantages (its key position as mainland Southeast Asia) and political independence from colonial powers. Therefore, communism in Thailand was deeply influenced by the Chinese and Vietnamese since its birth. When the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) embarked on the armed struggle approach in the 1960s, Maoism became the most important ideological source of the CPT. This research focuses on communism in Thailand and its external connections (especially China and Vietnam) since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This study aims to explore the Thai communist revolutionary movement from a transnational perspective to analyze the CPT's external connections and China's foreign policies. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, China's foreign policy has been seeking a balance between pragmatism and radicalism. China's foreign policy reached the peak of radicalism at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, which also accelerated the support of the CPT. This paper argues that the communist revolutionary movement in Thailand was a transnational movement that had connections with China, Vietnam and other communist parties in Southeast Asia; and that the PRC's foreign policy, which was shaped by internal and external factors, deeply influenced the CPT.

**Keywords:** China, Thailand, CPT, Cold War, Southeast Asia, Foreign policy

## 1. Introduction

As the only political opposition with armed forces and guided by ideology in the modern history of Thailand, the CPT is of great significance both in the contemporary history of Thailand and in Sino-Thai relations. Throughout the Cold War, there were various significant studies on the communist revolutionary movements in Thailand. However, the early studies were often subjected to the limitations of Chinese sources which led to the limitation of the research scope.

In recent years, many primary publications such as memoirs and interviews of relevant personnel have been published in Chinese, including memoirs of former KMT soldiers who participated in the suppression of the CPT (Gu, 2019), interviews of former core members of the CPT (Lei, 2010; 2016), and the activities of the CCP underground members in Thailand (*Taiguo guiqiao yinghun lu* [*The story of overseas Chinese in Thailand returning to China*], 1991). Li Qixin, as the first General Secretary of the CPT, collected articles he had written for Chinese media in Thailand from 1942 to 1947, and then published them in *Meijiang liuyan* [*Editorials along Chao Phraya River*].<sup>1</sup>

These recent publications, which are related to the history between China and the CPT, provide a transnational perspective for the study of the CPT. At present, most of the academic research on CPT was completed in the 1960s and 1980s. Scholars usually focus on the following aspects: the rise and fall of the CPT; the influence of the CPT on the Thai military, politics, and society. It is undeniable that Thailand itself provided the most significant nutrition for the growth of the Communist Party. But this paper focuses on the CPT and its connections with the external communist forces, especially China, in order to analyze the influence of the PRC on the CPT. The significance of this research is to show the complexity of the insurgency in Southeast Asia by highlighting the impact of external powers on the CPT. Furthermore, it provided empirical evidence to Cold War studies within Asia based on the relation between CPT and China.

## 2. The Early Communists in Siam/Thailand with External Influence

Long before the establishment of the early communist organizations in Siam, Siam's monarch began to express concern about the Marxist social revolution. From Rama V to Rama VII, they revealed concerns about the possibility of a communist or Bolshevik revolution in Siam (Batson, 1984, p.145). But when the communist revolution began to emerge around the

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<sup>1</sup> There are still doubts about whether he was the first General Secretary of the CPT.

world in the 1920s, most observers believed that Thailand had no revolutionary soil (Batson, 1984, pp.145-146). Indeed, the birth of communist organizations in Thailand was facilitated by external countries, mainly China and Vietnam. The communists in Thailand were mainly Vietnamese and Chinese.

During the anti-France colonial struggle in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Vietnamese nationalists gradually developed a revolutionary network connecting Siam, Vietnam and South China by making use of Vietnamese communities and migration routes (Goscha, 1999, pp.19-22). Finally, from the 1920s onwards, the Vietnamese communists transformed the former anti-colonial revolutionary network into a communist network to promote the communist revolution in Southeast Asia (Goscha, 1999, pp.64-96). For Vietnamese revolutionaries, Siam was an ideal intersection to promote the anti-colonial and independence movement in Southeast Asia due to its historical connections and geographical advantages (Goscha, 1999, pp.76-83). It was during this period that the Vietnamese helped form the Thai communist organization.

On April 20, 1930, Ho Chi Minh founded the Siamese Communist Party (SCP) in Bangkok (Kasian, 2001, p.20). A former CPT member recalled that Ho Chi Minh came to Bangkok as a representative of the Comintern, pretending to be a Chinese doctor. Ho then rented a small hotel opposite the Hua Lamphong railway station to hold the founding meeting of the SCP (Interview by Lei Yang, 2016). There were three members in the first Central Committee of the SCP, two of whom were Vietnamese, including Ngo Chinh Quoc who was later the first general secretary of the SCP, and one Chinese who was a cadre of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) from Teochew. The first two general secretaries of the SCP were Vietnamese. However, in the 1930s, the Siamese government stepped up its suppression of communists in Thailand. After the Siamese government enacted the first Anti-Communist Act in 1933, many Vietnamese communists in Siam were arrested and deported. Nguyen Tri Thuc, the SCP's representative to the Comintern, was also arrested (Goscha, 1999, pp.90-96). In 1935, many Vietnamese revolutionary bases in Siam were banned by the government.

In 1936, a Chinese communist cadre, Liu Sushi, took over as the general secretary of the SCP after consultation with Ho Chi Minh in Shanghai (Lei, 2016, p.223). From then on, the SCP's leadership shifted from the Vietnamese to the Chinese. However, since its birth with the dominance of the Vietnamese and Chinese, the SCP has been a very loose organization with limited influence in Thai society. And there were two parallel communist organizations in Thailand. Another communist organization was the Siam Branch of the Chinese Communist Party or the Chinese Communist Party of Thailand (CCPT) (Chutima, 1990, p.7). The members of the CCPT were the Chinese communists who fled to Thailand after the KMT-CCP split in

1927. The main purpose of the CCPT was to support the anti-Japanese war and the communist revolution in China. As soon as the Chinese Civil War ended, the CCPT ceased operations. Most of its members went back to China, while some remaining members participated in the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), which was believed to have previously been the SCP.

In 1941, the Comintern sent Li Qixin (a member of the CCP) to Thailand from Hong Kong to reorganize the loose and split Thai communist organizations. The provisional Committee of the SCP was renamed the Special Committee of the Communist Party of Thailand. The Special Committee was composed of Li Qixin, who was the general secretary of the committee, Qiu Ji and Li Hua as committee members. After the integration and adjustment of the communists in Thailand by the Special Committee, the CPT was formally established on December 1, 1942. The first general secretary of the CPT was Li Hua, who was Chinese and had been the general secretary of the SCP since 1939 (Lei, 2016, p.227).<sup>2</sup> The SCP ceased to operate after the establishment of the CPT. As mentioned earlier, there was another parallel communist organization, which was the CCPT. It is believed that the CCPT was much stronger than the CPT. However, there seems to be no clear boundary between the two communist organizations, and there was also an overlap in the members. Li Qixin was a commonly influential leader of both the CCPT and the CPT.

Communists in Thailand established their own armed forces in the 1940s. After the outbreak of the Second World War, the Japanese army entered Thailand, which prompted the communists in Thailand to regard Thailand as the main target and gradually integrate into Thai politics (Kasian, 2001, pp.52-54). Qiu Ji, one of the members of the Special Committee of the CPT, set up the Anti-Japanese Volunteer Force in 1941. There were 80 members in the Anti-Japanese Volunteer Force at the beginning. The Anti-Japanese Volunteer Force expanded to 650 members at the end of the Second World War (Li Qixin, 2004, p.3; Interview by Lei Yang, 2016, pp. 226-228). This armed force of the CPT had some conflicts with Thai police and had seized some weapons from the Thai government, but only had two small-scale fights with the Japanese directly (Baker, 2003, p.522). The Anti-Japanese Volunteer Force established a central armed base with about 100 people in Chonburi. Prasong Wangwiwat (Sino-Thai), who was the deputy general secretary (1943) and later became the second general secretary (1952) of the CPT, led some armed forces of the CPT to establish a joint armed force with the Malaysian Communist Party (MCP) in Sadao, Songkhla province, with the main purpose of

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<sup>2</sup> Some people believed that Li Qixin was the first general secretary of the CPT. As a senior member of the CPT, Long Ning claimed that Li Hua was the first general secretary.

being anti-Japanese. Long Ning (a former CPT member) recalled that during the Second World War, Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) transported airdropped weapons of the Allies to CPT forces (Interview by Lei Yang, 2016, p.229).

Since the Thai government, which was dominated by Prime Minister Plaek Phibunsongkhram, allied with Japan and declared war on the United Kingdom and the United States on 25 January 1942, some Thai politicians, such as Seni Pramoj and Pridi Banomyong, organized the Free Thai Movement with American assistance. Many Thai students and Thai embassies joined the Free Thai Movement whose objective was resisting Japan and training intelligence personnel working for Allies of World War II. During this period, the main purposes of the CPT were to “restore and build up a proletarian political party based on the principles of Marxism-Leninism and the thought of Mao Zedong; lead the people's fight to expel the invading piratical Japanese; overthrow the traitorous regime; restore independence and safeguard the fatherland. (CPT, 1978, p.2)”

The Free Thai Movement provided the CPT with a good opportunity for its development. It was believed that communists communicated with some members of the Free Thai Movement, such as Tieng Sirikhan, Tong-in Buripat and Tim Buripat (Morell and Chaianan, 1981, p.79). The CPT was able to attract a number of Thais to join the party, which was the first time the communists could spread their ideas outside of the Chinese ethnic community through the anti-Japanese movement (Yuangrat, 1981, p.325). Pridi Banomyong, the leader of the Free Thai Movement, later denied that there was any connection between the Free Thai Movement and the CPT (Morell and Chaianan, 1981, p.79, footnote 15). However, Long Ning, former member of the CPT Central Committee, stated that during the Free Thai Movement, the CPT sent a member of the Central Committee as a representative to contact Pridi Banomyong. The CPT's representative was also a sergeant of the Royal Thai Armed Forces (RTAF). During the cooperation between the CPT and the Free Thai Movement, he was responsible for communicating with Pridi (Interview by Lei Yang, 2016, p.235). Throughout the Second World War, even though the CPT tried to integrate into Thailand, and sought to cooperate with various forces. It is a fact that the Marxist ideology and communist revolution were still totally strange alien products to Thai people at the time. Until the end of the Second World War, most of the Thai masses and intellectuals did not show any interest in Marxism.

After the end of the Second World War, Thailand avoided becoming a vanquished country. In order to participate in the United Nations, Thailand repealed the Anti-Communist Act in 1946. With the abolition of the Anti-Communist Act, the CPT was finally able to participate in political activities as a legitimate political party (Casella, 1970, p.200). When the

CPT got legal status, most of the communists went from the jungle and rural areas to the cities to seek the parliamentary peace line to achieve their political ambition (Baker, 2003, p.522). The armed force was closed down by the CPT itself. After the Second World War, the CPT improved its ability to organize workers. Bangkok Labor Federation and Association of United Workers of Thailand were established by the CPT in Bangkok. The CPT successfully organized a general rice mill strike near Chao Phraya River in early 1948. It was reported that 69 rice mills joined the Chao Phraya strike, which put the industry in trouble (Du, 2016, p.50). The enhancement of the mobilization capacity of the CPT was partly due to Thai people showing increasing interest in Marxism after the Second World War because of changes in the international situation and curiosity towards the rise of communist China (Kasian, 2001, pp.63-64).

### **3. Revolutionary Characteristics of the PRC and Transient Peaceful Coexistence in the 1950s**

There is no doubt that the victory of the CCP in the Chinese Civil War greatly inspired the CPT. The CPT was also increasingly influenced by the PRC's ideology and politics. The revolutionary character of the CCP determined the newly founded PRC's assistance to the communist revolutionary movements in Southeast Asia. A significant characteristic of the PRC's diplomacy under the leadership of Mao Zedong was the revolutionary characteristic that was inherited from the CCP's experience with the struggle in revolutions (Yang, 2010, pp.62-64). In August 1944, Zhou Enlai stated that the foreign policy of the CPC Central Committee was a part of the international United Front—in other words, a special form of global class struggle (CPC Central Committee, 1944, Aug 18, cited by Yang (2010), p.66).<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the revolutionary diplomacy after the founding of the PRC was that the CCP recognized and dealt with international relations and issues from the perspective of class struggle (Yang, 2010, p.65).

After the founding of the PRC in 1949, the new regime immediately implemented three significant foreign policies: 'clean up the house before treating' (*dasao ganjing wuzi zai qingke*); 'set up a separate kitchen' (*ling qi luzao*); and 'leaning to one side' (*yi bian dao*). Among them, the first two policies were put forward by Mao Zedong in the plenary session of the Seventh Central Committee of the CCP in March 1949. Both 'clean up the house before treating' (*dasao ganjing wuzi zai qingke*) and 'set up a separate kitchen' (*ling qi luzao*) refer to the elimination of the 'residual forces and privileges of imperialism in China and all unequal treaties before

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<sup>3</sup> Instructions on diplomatic work issued by the CPC Central Committee in 1944, Aug 18.

considering the establishment of diplomatic relations with Western countries (Shang, 2021, p.14). 'Leaning to one side' (*yi bian dao*) was adopted in the early days of the founding of the PRC. It was not only to establish an alliance with the Soviet Union, but also to firmly support the Communist camp, and oppose imperialism and the western capitalist camp led by the United States. After adopting these policies, Chinese communist leaders regarded the capitalist camp as the enemy and united with the Communist camp against them (Fang, 2010, pp.43-49). These policies, which were based on domestic and international class struggle considerations, structured the basic framework of China's foreign policy in the early period. As the largest newly founded communist country in Asia, China urgently needed to strengthen its legitimacy in the communist camp by exporting its own revolutionary experience.

Southeast Asia, as a region that just got rid of colonialism and was geographically close to China with a large number of overseas Chinese, naturally attracted the special attention of the new Chinese government. At the International Worker Conference in November 1949, Liu Shaoqi, who was Vice Chairman of the Chinese People's Revolutionary Military Commission, called on the proletariats in the Indochina states of Burma, Indonesia and Malaya to openly raise the armed struggles to oppose the imperialists. Liu Shaoqi stated that Southeast Asian countries that had not yet established revolutionary armies should strive to develop them (Party Literature Research Center, 2005, pp.130-138). Mao Zedong believed that war and revolution were always the main themes of the world. He said that 'we will support revolution wherever it occurs,' and that China's diplomatic purpose was to promote world revolution (MOFA, 1994, p.565). Some Southeast Asian communists followed China's revolutionary methods to guide and promote communist revolutionary movements. The CPT, at this time, openly called on the people of Thailand to unite to fight for national independence and democracy through Chinese media in Thailand in 1950 (*People's Daily*, 1950, Nov.21).

However, the expansion of China's influence in Southeast Asia utilizing revolutionary propaganda and the ideology of armed struggle did not achieve ideal results. Instead, it deepened the fear and doubt of the most independent Southeast Asian countries towards China and overseas Chinese. China's revolutionary diplomacy provided "interpretations" or "excuses" for Southeast Asian countries to launch anti-Sino policies. With the support of the US and the military group, Thai General Phibun returned to power on the grounds of anti-communism. China's revolutionary diplomacy and the complex Chinese issues in Thailand roused great concern for the Thai ruling class about the threat of communism in Thailand. Phibun said that "If necessary, Chinese immigrants might be entirely banned," because he declared that most of these Chinese were supporters of communism (Kobkua, 1995, p.228).

Phibun emphasized that “the communists would eventually overthrow the King of Thailand and the Constitution... the Chinese, White or Red, are a menace if too many of them are permitted to enter the country (Foreign Office 371/129615, Bangkok, 1957, Feb 26. Cited by Kobkua, 1995, p.64.).”

Following the return of Prime Minister Phibun (1948-1957), anti-communist policies were implemented to the whole society. The Sino-US confrontation and emerging communist insurgencies in Thailand provided a good opportunity and proper reason for Phibun to cut off political and ideological ties between ethnic Chinese and communist China. Thailand regarded the CCP’s victory in China as a serious threat to Thailand. On the other hand, the victory of the CCP gave great encouragement to the CPT, which was still dominated by ethnic Chinese and had a strong connection with the CCP (Yuangrat, 1981, pp.325-339; Marks, 1994, p.31). The CPT criticized the Phibun government and the US Empire, stating that they had colluded to suppress the people (*People’s Daily*, 1950, Nov 21). The leadership of the CPT was also strongly convinced of the path of armed struggle. From the CPT’s perspective, the victory of the CCP paved the correct path to liberation for all semi-colonial, semi-feudal countries including Thailand (CPT, 1978, p.6).

During the second Phibun era (1948 to 1957), a large number of Chinese schools and newspapers were closed in Thailand, the Chinese economy was restricted and new immigrants were also restricted. Thailand carried out an economic blockade against mainland China in order to shut down the connection between the Chinese and the original homeland. All in all, China’s revolutionary diplomacy in the early days of the founding of the PRC and the development of the communist insurgencies in Thailand caused fear in China and ethnic Chinese. At the same time, it also provided an excuse for the Thai ruling class to implement anti-Sino policies. With the Thai government’s increasing crackdown on the CPT, the CPT held the second National Congress<sup>4</sup> in 1952 to adapt to the new situation. Since holding the second National Congress in Bangkok, the CPT gradually shifted its attention to the countryside without giving up the development of its urban activities (Rousset, 2009). It should be noted that the Phibun government’s anti-communist policies were not only ideological. Internally, opposing communism was complicated in the 1950s; it involved power struggles between

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<sup>4</sup> The most significant achievements for the CPT in Second Party Congress were that the CPT officially completed the Party-building, reshaped the Politburo and the Central Committee .Prasong Wangwiwat was elected to be the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Thailand.

Pridi's supporters, Phibun, and the Phin-Phao clique (Chinvanno, 1992, pp.80-84). At the same time, Phibun's strategy of dealing with communist China was more out of national security, internal power struggle and geopolitical considerations.

Although, as mentioned above, the inherent revolutionary characteristic of the CCP was an important reason for its implementation of revolutionary diplomacy. However, after the CCP's political status was changed from a revolutionary party to a ruling party, the CCP had to revise revolutionary diplomacy in order to develop normal international relations. China's attempt to establish peaceful diplomacy first started with India, and then extended to Myanmar and other Southeast Asian countries. Both China and India were newly independent countries in Asia, and there were border disputes between the two countries. If China and India could develop peaceful diplomatic relations, it would bring China great international prestige and shape a friendly image. On December 31, 1953, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai put forward the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence when meeting the Indian diplomatic delegation in Beijing. The Five Principles, as stated later in the *Sino-Indian Agreement 1954*, were listed as: mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; mutual non-aggression; mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful co-existing.

In June 1954, Zhou Enlai signed the *Joint Statement of China and Burmese Prime Ministers*, in which Zhou stressed that the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence were the basic norms of bilateral relations (*People's Daily*, 1954, June 29). Southeast Asian countries became the first testing ground for China to implement the diplomatic principle of peaceful coexistence. Subsequently, China participated in the Bandung Conference held in 1955. The principle of peaceful coexistence jointly advocated by China, India, and Burma was recognized by Asian and African countries. At the Bandung Conference, the PRC's peaceful coexistence policy eased doubts in Thailand regarding the revolution output by China. During the meeting, Zhou Enlai met with the Thai delegation and put forward China's peace proposal. From 1955 to 1957, Prime Minister Phibun Songkhram sent several Thai envoys to China to improve bilateral relations. Meanwhile, throughout the late 1950s, the CPT entered a dormant period, with few influential political or military actions.

#### **4. The Return of the PRC's Revolutionary Diplomacy and the Armed Struggle of the CPT**

However, in the late 1950s, China's diplomacy towards Southeast Asia again turned towards revolution. Beyond the ideology factor, it can be regarded as passive resistance to the U.S. encirclement formed in Southeast Asia. On September 8, 1958, at the Supreme State

Affairs Conference, Mao Zedong strongly expressed dissatisfaction with the U.S. for establishing military bases overseas (*Hongqi*, 1958, pp.1-4). In fact, during Phibun's last few years in power (1955-1957), he secretly improved relations with China and sent secret envoys to Beijing (Kasian, 2001, pp.66-67). However, it was at the end of the 1950s that Sino-Thai relations began to turn from mutual attraction to complete hostility after General Sarit seized power through a coup in 1957 (Gurtov, 1971, p.15). Since then, Thailand had relied on the U.S. and helped to intervene in Indochina. At the same time, dramatic changes took place in the PRC's internal politics and foreign policy. The CPT also rapidly became active in the 1960s.

From 1958 to 1960, Mao Zedong led a social production movement called the Great Leap Forward. Mao tried to turn China into an industrial state by launching a mass production movement. However, this utopian production movement eventually led to more than 30 million people starving to death (Yang, 2012, p.427). The Great Leap Forward also led to a leftist trend in China's diplomacy and worsened the internal relations between China and the communist camp. The contradiction between ideology and territorial security between China and the Soviet Union was becoming more and more serious. The Great Leap Forward was the turning point of China's diplomacy from the rational line to the revolutionary line.

The disastrous result of the Great Leap Forward led Mao to face significant criticism within the CCP, and the rational cadres headed by Liu Shaoqi began to restore the regular order of the country, including foreign relations. In 1962, Wang Jiaxiang, Minister of the International Liaison Department of the CCP, proposed that they should not overemphasize class struggle and make enemies on all sides in foreign relations. Wang believed that China should concentrate more on improving its domestic economic situation rather than revolutionary output. However, partly out of worry about losing power after the Great Leap Forward, Mao Zedong attacked Liu Shaoqi by criticizing moderate foreign policy. In 1963, Mao Zedong criticized, "some people (Wang Jiaxiang) advocate being more amiable to imperialism, reactionaries, revisionists, and reducing assistance for the struggle of the people of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This is the revisionist line (Ma, 2003, p.136)." In February 1964, Mao Zedong once again criticized the moderate diplomatic line as international revisionism. The extreme left of the CCP gradually gained power with the support of Mao Zedong in the 1960s.

With the victory of the extreme left in the internal struggle of the CCP and the U.S. deeply involved in Southeast Asian military affairs, China's foreign policy abandoned the principle of Peaceful Coexistence. In early 1962, the PRC's Ministry of Foreign Affairs asked embassies and foreign affairs departments to fight against revisionism and imperialism. At the same time, relevant staff stationed abroad also needed to publicize China's political thoughts

(PRC MOFA Archives, 1962, Jan 6, No.102-001-00141-0032). In 1962, a leader in charge of overseas Chinese affairs declared that “we are all Marxists and want to carry out the world revolution. Therefore, it is of great significance to educate overseas Chinese to serve the world revolution (Zhan Jiang Archives, 1962, Feb 12, No.32-A12.1-101).” Chen Ping, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Malaysia (CPM), recalled that the CPM had decided to give up the armed struggle and take the parliamentary road in the early 1960s, but the leadership of the CCP told them to continue the armed struggle. The Central Committee of the CCP persuaded the CPM that the revolutionary situation in Southeast Asia was to undergo significant changes, and the best time for a revolution in Southeast Asia was coming (Chen, 2004, pp.383-389).

At the same time, due to the Tibet conflict in 1959 and the Sino-Indian border war in 1962, China’s attempt to create an image of peaceful coexistence ultimately failed in Asia. In late 1965, Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi was reported saying the following: “We hope to have a guerrilla war going in Thailand before the year is out (Chinwanno, 1989, p.83).” After China openly expressed its support for the armed struggle in Thailand, the armed clashes between the CPT and the Royal Thai Government (RTG) began to occur intensely. On August 7, 1965, CPT’s guerrillas launched the first attack on security forces in Na Kae District of Nakhon Phanom Province (Saiyud, 1986, p.180). Even though China’s diplomacy was revolutionized again, before the Cultural Revolution, Zhou Enlai, Liu Shaoqi, and others in charge of diplomacy still tried to find a balance in foreign relations. Diplomatic bureaucracy tried to prevent China’s diplomacy from going to the extreme.

However, China’s diplomacy completely lost control and fell into chaos from 1966 to 1969. At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, Mao Zedong used the extreme left, such as Lin Biao and Kang Sheng, to attack Liu Shaoqi’s foreign policy in an attempt to overthrow Liu’s political faction. Kang Sheng said, “After reading a lot of materials about Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, [we know that] Liu and Deng surrendered to the imperialists, to revisionism, to the reactionaries and to dissolve the revolution. They are not following the path of China, they are following the path of India (*The Senior Jailer*, 2016, p.86).” When the Cultural Revolution reached its peak, foreign affairs stagnated. As a consequence of depriving Liu Shaoqi’s faction of political power, the previous pragmatic diplomatic line encountered intense criticism (Jiang, 2016, pp.35-46). In 1967, Defence Minister Lin Biao publicized that China was the center of the world revolution and that China should support the people’s army struggle all over the world (Jin and Huang, 1989, pp.147-148). Meanwhile, the diplomatic system was

dominated by extreme left ideology, so the propaganda of Maoism became the primary goal of diplomatic work.

## 5. The External Assistance in the CPT's Armed Uprising

With the extreme leftism of China's internal politics and foreign policy, China's support for the CPT also increased greatly since the 1960s. When the CPT gradually shifted from the cities to remote areas, it became easier to connect with external support forces, namely, Laotian, Vietnamese, Burmese, and Chinese forces through border areas. In April 1965, China's Premier Zhou Enlai and Foreign Minister Chen Yi implied that Thailand should not interfere too much with the conflicts in Indochina, otherwise China would fully support the Thai people's war led by the CPT. However, Thailand believed that even if they didn't interfere in the Indochina conflict, China and Vietnam would still support the CPT, so only by relying on US military strength can Thailand be protected from communism (Gurtov, 1971, pp.25-28). General Saiyud Kerdphol, who was Supreme Commander of the Royal Thai Armed Forces, mentioned that China gave 1 million dollars of financial aid to the CPT in 1965, even though China had given little aid to the CPT before (Saiyud, 1986, pp.32-33). The Lao Communist party also helped to deliver Chinese and Vietnamese aid to the CPT.

On August 7, 1965, the CPT's guerrillas launched the first attack on security forces in North Thailand (Saiyud, 1986, p.180). Since then, the armed struggle had rapidly expanded in remote areas of Thailand. The CPT quickly developed Hmong tribe guerrillas as anti-government forces at the border mountain in Chiang Rai (Lovelace, 1971, pp.16-18). The combination of communism with external and internal forces in the remote areas immediately brought the border under threat to the Thai Government (*Ibid*). A declassified document from the United States Armed Forces, 7<sup>th</sup> Psychological Operations Group showed about 1,000 official members of the CPT operating in Thailand at around 1966.<sup>5</sup> The CPT based at the border mountain areas easily received supplies from the ethnic tribesmen and external communist forces. The *People's Daily* reported that the CPT's armed action had spread to 25 provinces and fought more than 500 times. In total, more than 1,000 enemies were wiped out by the CPT's armed struggle between 1965 and 1967 (*People's Daily*, 1967, Aug 17).

During this period, the Royal Thai Government (RTG) implemented a series of measures to counter communist insurgency. General Saiyud Kerdphol stated that the local

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<sup>5</sup>The 7<sup>th</sup> Psychological Operations Group is a psychological operations unit of the United States Army Reserve.

authorities could not handle the communists' violent activities in the 1960s, so it was necessary to respond to the CPT with a national-level agency (Saiyud, 1986, pp.14-17). However, the Thai government did not achieve effective results during this period. Bob Bergin, a former US CIA official, admitted that the CPT forces had actually increased in the 1960s even under severe suppression by the government (Bergin, 2016, p.27). The rapid development of the CPT was inseparable from external assistance.

Since the 1950s, China had received some backbone members of the CPT for political training in the Marxist-Leninist Institute in Beijing, and there is also a cadre training center in Kunming, Yunnan province (Gurtov, 1971, pp.16-17). It is believed that by 1969, China had trained about 700 main cadres of the CPT (*Ibid*). North Vietnam had also participated in the CPT training program since 1962. The training school was located in Hoa Binh, not far from Hanoi. In 1965, 130 Thais received military training here (*Ibid*). Trained communist cadres went through Hong Kong, Laos, and Vietnam to head to Thailand. China's training for the CPT was mainly focused on the politics and ideology of senior cadres, while Vietnam's training was more focused on the military training of middle and lower-level cadres. This is one of the reasons why China had a greater ideological influence on the CPT than Vietnam. In addition, the establishment of the Voice of the People of Thailand (VOPT) in 1962 was a significant step for China to assist CPT. This radio station was based in Yunnan, China. The guiding principle and theoretical program of the CPT were broadcast by VOPT—and at the same time, the armed struggle was also encouraged by VOPT (Ding, 2015, p.34). The radio was broadcast for a total of 17 years before it stopped in 1979.

With the help of the Laotian communists, the CPT of northern Thailand could withdraw to Laos at any time whenever it encountered military repression. Lao Communist forces also provided military support to the CPT. Gu Xuejing was a former KMT officer who fought with the CPT in Chiang Rai, northern Thailand. Gu recalled that after a battle with the CPT in 1970, KMT troops captured a local headquarters. The commander of the CPT fled to Laos to seek support. About half a month later, a group composed of around 500 Laotian and Vietnamese people snuck into northern Thailand to help the CPT fight (Gu, 2019, pp.343-344). The KMT encountered the joint operations of the Thais, Laotians and Vietnamese communists many times. Gu mentioned that after a cruel battle with the CPT, the KMT troops seized many documents from the CPT. Most of which were Chinese books, propaganda brochures in Thai, and documents and notes written in Vietnamese (Gu, 2019, p.335).

Guo Jianye was a PLA officer stationed in Mengla, Yunnan province from 1968 to 1978. The main task of his troops was to provide material assistance to the Communist Parties of

Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand. Guo's troops had been providing supplies to the CPT since 1967. At first, the material assistance for the CPT mainly depended on mules and horses. Later, the PLA provided trucks for the CPT to deliver the supplies due to the rapid development of the CPT (Guo, 2009, pp.35-36). However, the CPT in southern Thailand had difficulty receiving assistance from China or Vietnam due to geographical limitations. The CPT in southern Thailand contacted and cooperated with the Communist Party of Malaysia (CPM). The CPT and the CPM exchanged military technology with each other. The CPM taught the CPT to make mines, and the CPM provided some supplies for the CPM (Ong, 2015, p.136).

As mentioned above, as early as the Second World War, the CPT in southern Thailand led by Prasong Wangwiwat already formed a joint anti-Japanese force with the MCP. The CPT and the MCP had a long history of cooperation in southern Thailand. Long Ning, a former CPT member in southern Thailand, recalled that the CPT members usually spoke Thai whenever they met. But whenever they spoke to MCP members in Mandarin, some MCP members could not understand and needed it to be translated into the Hakka or Teochew dialect (Interview by Lei Yang, 2010, p.65). The CPT and the MCP in southern Thailand had always been a matter of concern for Thailand and Malaysia. To relieve the anxiety, the Thai government and the Malaysian government signed the *New Border Cooperation Agreement* in March 1970 to jointly deal with the communist insurgencies in southern Thailand. The forces of the two countries could enter within five kilometers of each other's territories to carry out military operations against the communists (Ong, 2015, p.118).

## 6. The Change in the PRC's Foreign Policy and the Decline of the CPT

From 1966 to 1969, China's diplomacy was out of control. More than 30 diplomatic countries had diplomatic conflicts or tensions with China. China was isolated in the international community. After 1969, when Mao Zedong completely eliminated Liu Shaoqi's influence and firmly controlled the supreme power, foreign policy began to restore partial rationality. Zhou Enlai was the main executor of the restoration of diplomatic order on the front line with the acquiescence of Mao Zedong. In August 1971, when meeting with the president of Mexico Excelsior, Zhou Enlai pointed out that he disagreed with the extreme leftists in China who regarded China as the center of the world revolution (Chronicles of Zhou Enlai's diplomatic activities, 1993, p.603). In addition to the end of the internal political struggle, there was also the consideration of the external environment, since China suffered from the security challenges of the United States and the Soviet Union, and China's diplomacy was dominated by the ultra-left in the early part of the Cultural Revolution. Therefore, China was faced with

severe peripheral security concerns in the late 1960s (Wang, 2021, pp.75-85). Thus, the CCP leaders were trying to find new approaches to improve foreign relations and relieve external pressure.

On February 22, 1974, when meeting with Zambian President Kaonda, Mao Zedong put forward the Three Worlds Theory for the first time. Mao Zedong said, “I think the United States and the Soviet Union are the first worlds. Japan, Europe, Australia, and Canada, are the second worlds. We are the third world...the whole Asia is the third worlds except Japan (Party Literature Research Center, 2002, pp.520-521).” Mao Zedong believed that the struggle for world hegemony among superpowers was the main reason for the instability of the world. The Three Worlds Theory was the main force against imperialism, colonialism and hegemonism. The Three Worlds Theory showed that China was seeking to develop pragmatic diplomacy in the mid-1970s. Chinese leaderships tried to revise the previous revolutionary diplomacy through the Three Worlds Theory. The Three Worlds Theory was seriously criticized by some international communists because it weakened the class struggle of Marxism. Enver Hoxha, the leader of Albania, strongly opposed the Three Worlds Theory. He argued that the Three Worlds Theory, which denied the fundamental contradiction between imperialism and proletarian revolution, was not a Marxist-Leninist theory (Wang, 2014). In sum, the Three Worlds Theory went beyond the previous framework of recognizing the enemy and friends according to ideology and the social-political system. This was a turning point for China to gradually abandon revolutionary diplomacy.

As mentioned above, Mao Zedong developed the Three Worlds Theory that diminished the revolutionary characteristics of class struggle. In mid-1975, with the improvement of Sino-U.S. relations and the end of the Vietnam War, China’s concern about security threats from Southeast Asia was dispelled following the withdrawal of American forces from Indochina. Southeast Asian countries also tried to improve relations with China in line with their national interests, highlighted diplomatic autonomy and got rid of the influence of the big powers. As a result, the cessation of hostility between China and Southeast Asian countries reshaped China’s foreign policy towards Southeast Asia. From the mid-1970s, China gradually established diplomatic relations with Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines (Zhang, 2018, pp.8-9). However, as a revolutionary leader with significant influence, Mao Zedong never gave up the revolutionary ideology. To achieve a balance between revolutionary ideology and diplomatic reality, Chinese leaderships adopted Dual Track Diplomacy since the mid-1970s. The Chinese government maintained formal diplomatic relations with Southeast Asian governments—

meanwhile, the CCP continued its relations with Southeast Asian communist parties regardless of whether these communist parties held legal status or not in their countries.

China implemented Two-Track Diplomacy for two reasons. First, the CCP never abandoned the idea of a communist world revolution until the end of 1978. Second, Southeast Asia was a critical communist ideological battlefield between the Chinese and Soviet camps (including Vietnam), so China did not want to lose the ideological war in this region (Li, 2014, pp.8-13). However, the strategy of revolutionary diplomacy brought a great negative influence on China. The failure to give up revolutionary characteristics created obstacles for China to enhance its relations with Southeast Asian countries. At the same time, it also led to the contradiction between China's diplomatic purpose and diplomatic practice. Since the Bandung Conference in 1955, China always emphasized pursuing an independent, peaceful foreign policy, but the implementation of revolutionary diplomacy created a non-peaceful international image (Wei, 2010, pp.65-68).

When Deng Xiaoping fully consolidated his political power and eliminated the ultra-left forces within the CCP in the late 1970s, China's diplomacy began to break away from revolutionary characteristics. Deng led China's foreign relations to achieve two critical changes. Firstly, he reassessed the international situation and changed the original view that 'the danger of war is imminent.' The new CCP leaders believed that 'it is possible not to have a large-scale world war for a long time, and it is hopeful of maintaining world peace.' Therefore, the second generation of the CCP leadership hoped to concentrate on modernization (Fang, 2010, p.47). Secondly, the change of foreign policy, from the 'one line' strategy to 'nonalignment.' Deng Xiaoping argued that "China's foreign policy is independent and truly nonaligned. China does not play the U.S. card, nor does it play the Soviet card, nor does it allow others to play the Chinese card. The goal of China's foreign policy is to strive for world peace. On the premise of striving for peace, we should concentrate on modernization, developing our country, and building socialism with Chinese characteristics (*Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, 1993, p.57)." Deng believed that foreign relations should be based on China's national interests and set their own interests as the highest criterion when dealing with international issues (*Selected Works of Deng*, 1993, p.330).

To cooperate with Southeast Asian countries, China had to consider the opinions of ASEAN members who did not want China to support the communist insurgencies in the region. Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew met China Prime Minister Zhao Ziyang in August 1981. Lee stated:

*None of the ASEAN countries has any need for communism or communist parties to*

*bring about a better economic life for their people. Every ASEAN government is convinced that its own communists are threats only because of outside assistance and interference* (Heston, 1982, pp.779-800).

Surprisingly, New China News Agency (*xinhua she*) published Lee's speech later, which means Lee's viewpoint was recognized by Chinese leadership.<sup>6</sup> On August 20, 1983, Chinese Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian stated that the CCP adhered to the four principles of independence, complete equality, non-interference and mutual respect to deal with relations with other communist parties. Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian also stated that China would not interfere in the CPT issue, which was an internal affair of Thailand's, because China would like to maintain friendship and cooperation with the Thai government and people.<sup>7</sup> With the change of the international situation, especially the sweeping change of China's foreign relations, most communist parties in Southeast Asia rapidly declined in the 1980s.

The end of the Cultural Revolution in China undermined the legitimacy of the CPT's Maoist ideology. Peking's reform and opening up had caused a negative ideological impact on the CPT, who regarded Mao Zedong as a great revolutionary leader in this world. The Central Committee of the CPT sent a telegram to China celebrating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the PRC. The telegram stated that the CPT advocated the change of the ultra-leftist line of China and the elimination of the Gang of Four. Still, the CPT persisted in taking the armed Maoist revolutionary strategy of surrounding the cities by the countryside.<sup>8</sup> However, this was the last public interaction between the CCP and the CPT.

Another major event affecting the political situation in Southeast Asia was the Cambodian-Vietnam War in 1978. Vietnamese troops invaded Democratic Kampuchea on 25 December 1978. Just 15 days later, the new regime, which was regarded as the puppet of Vietnam, was installed in Phnom Penh. As the main supporter of the Khmer Rouge, China could tolerate Vietnam's invasion. Therefore, China and Thailand cooperated in supplying military assistance to the Cambodian resistance parties (including the Khmer Rouge), which operated in Thai territory. Thailand helped the Khmer Rouge reorganize the armed forces of 2,000 to 40,000 people to crack down on Vietnam. Thus, the importance of the CPT to China was decreasing. Thai leaders also took this opportunity to persuade China to give up its support

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<sup>6</sup>New China News Agency )NCNA (published Lee's speech on August 12, 1982.

<sup>7</sup>Chinese Foreign Minister's Press Conference in Bangkok on August 1, 1983, published by Xinhua News Agency on August 2, 1983.

<sup>8</sup>The Celebration telegram from the Central Committee of the CPT on Sep 30<sup>th</sup>, 1979 .

for the CPT. General Chavalit visited China and met Deng Xiaoping in Peking in 1979. Chavalit said:

*I went to China and spoke with Deng Xiaoping. My position was that it would seem better for China to side with most Thai people rather than the small number that made up the CPT. Thailand could be a good friend* (Interview by Bergin, 2016).

Apart from China's estrangement, the CPT also faced pressure from Vietnam and Laos. Since the Sino-Vietnam conflicts, Vietnam and Laos interrupted all aid to the CPT and blocked the supply routes from China to Thailand. The Prime Minister of Vietnam Pham Van Dong openly announced that Vietnam stopped Vietnamese aid to the CPT in 1979 (Kistemaker, 1980, pp.1614-1615). Then, the Central Committee of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) ordered the CPT to vacate their bases in Laos (Marks, 1994, p.189).

Aside from external pressure, the internal split of the CPT was the last straw to crush the CPT. After the massacre of the Thammasat University in 1976, thousands of intellectuals fled into jungles to join the CPT. However, there were great ideological differences between the intellectuals and the CPT. The core members of the CPT were Maoism who had very close ties with China since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, most new intellectuals did not have deep roots in China and did not accept Maoism as the only correct revolutionary approach in Thailand. In the eyes of intellectuals, the CPT became a puppet of China and the CCP. Most of the intellectuals soon returned to the cities when the government issued amnesty order 66/2523. Later, most of the CPT cadres also defected and surrendered to the government. Starting from the 1980s, the CPT gradually disappeared from the Thai political arena when it faced internal division and a lack of external support.

## 7. Conclusion

Communism in Thailand came from the East, and the communist revolutionary movements were closely combined with the Chinese and Vietnamese from the beginning. The Chinese and Vietnamese first established communist organizations in Thailand. From the late 1930s to World War II, the Chinese gradually gained the leading position in the communist revolutionary movements in Thailand. During World War II, the communists in Thailand established the CPT and set up armed forces that took an anti-Japanese stance. After the end of World War II, the CPT obtained a very short-term legal party status and sought to take the parliamentary approach. However, since Thai politics was again controlled by an anti-

communist military in the 1950s, and the newly established PRC of the Chinese Communist Party gave great encouragement to the CPT, the CPT gradually abandoned the parliamentary line and followed the Maoist revolutionary approach.

The PRC's domestic political changes and the swing of its diplomatic line always affected the CPT. The 1960s, when China provided great assistance to the CPT, coincided with the era when China's internal politics moved towards the extreme left. At the same time, the CPT had close ties with communist parties in neighboring countries, such as Laos, Vietnam and Malaysia. However, when the peak of the Cultural Revolution ended in 1969, the PRC's foreign policy began to return to rationality. Especially in the late 1970s, the new leadership of the CPT completely abandoned revolutionary diplomacy, which made the CPT lose its significant material and spiritual support.

At the same time, due to the deterioration of Sino-Vietnam relations, the CPT, which held a pro-Beijing position, also lost help from Laos and Vietnam in the late 1970s. Of course, the internal problem and the political situation in Thailand were also important factors that influenced the CPT. But when we observe the communist revolutionary movements in Thailand, and China's internal and foreign affairs together, we find that the rise and fall of the CPT was deeply influenced by external factors as well. The CPT was a transnational composition in terms of membership and development process. The communist revolutionary movements in Thailand crossed national boundaries in both ideology and membership which combined factors from China, Vietnam, and Thailand itself.

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