



The Logic of Historical Nihilism

Analyzing the PRC Orthodoxy on the Origins of the Korean War

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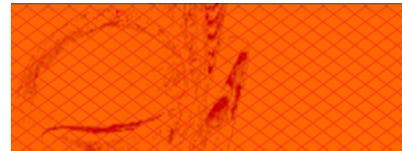
About the Author

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Cover Image: The Chinese Army during the Korean War, 1950 (source: Chinadaily)



Introduction

Of all histories written in the People's Republic of China (PRC), none are allowed to deviate from the Marxist-Leninist paradigm of "historical dialectical materialism" in official proclamations. Despite the Communist Party's catastrophic failure in the fulfillment of a socialist, communist paradise—what the late American historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. has aptly termed “the spectacular flop of history as prophecy”—the Party has used layers of beguiling interpretative frames to cover up the grand failure of its Utopian experiment in communism.¹

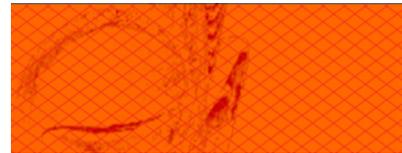
This task of injecting a teleological pseudo-history into the public perception is so crucial and daunting that it has become a matter of survival for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In other words, historical myth-making and regime survival have become symbiotic.

Of all the historical misrepresentations in Chinese intellectual orthodoxy, one stands out as mind-bogglingly anachronistic and ideologically charged: the origins of the Korean War. This essay seeks to examine this seemingly simple but intellectually challenging historical interpretation: how a view rooted in orthodoxy has been formed and sustained in communist China for several decades, and why the untruth embodied in this view is antithetical to historical records and facts.

Prelude to a Historical Orthodoxy

There have been a plethora of books, movies, and other forms of mass communication produced in communist China to fulfill Mao's ideological calling since the founding of the communist state in 1949. Among the materials that are the most widely available is a single volume called *A History of American Imperialism's Aggression in China* [美帝侵华史] published in 1951. It drew a direct connection between America's long history of interactions with China from 1784 when the first ever American merchant ship *The Empress of China* reached China, to the ongoing conflagration on the Korean Peninsula, the most important event of the time. During the Korean War, the U.S.-led coalition forces were engaged in intense armed conflict with more than one million Chinese military personnel disguised as the "Chinese People's Volunteer Army" or PVA.²

This book has exerted enormous influence within the communist historiography of U.S.-China relations. It has been reprinted many times over the past several decades, most recently in 2013, and tens of millions of copies have been distributed in China to schools and colleges. While Stalin's propaganda departments translated it into Russian immediately after its 1951 publication in Beijing. Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, *Pravda* and Soviet historians' organizations promoted the book in the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc countries. It was also translated into Korean in the DPRK, Czech in Czechoslovakia, and German in East Germany. *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (*Большая советская энциклопедия*) or *GSE*, the world's first Marxist-Leninist general-purpose encyclopedia, ran extensive entries on and excerpts of the book. In 1953, the Soviet Academy of Sciences awarded Liu Danian, the author and a senior communist party cadre, the prestigious *Stalin Prize* for the book.³



A quick glance at the book's table of contents, which has been reprinted repeatedly and distributed to tens of thousands of schools and colleges, indicates that the Chinese people should yield to China's Marxist dialectical view of the U.S. and its history of interaction with China. For example, to show an uninterrupted continuity of America's aggression against China, the book ends with America's military actions in Korea, which claim to be directly aimed at "our homeland," the socialist motherland of China. [See Table Below]

"History of American Imperialism's Aggression in China" by Liu Danian, People's Press, 1951

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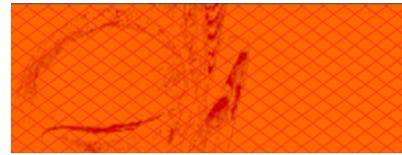
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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. U.S. imperialism is our most dangerous enemy 2. A bunch of shameless opium traffickers 3. Forced to sign the "Wangxia Treaty" 4. Signing of "Sino-US Treaty of Tianjin" 5. Participating in the suppression of the Taiping Revolution 6. Aggression in Korea and Taiwan 7. "China's open door policy" 8. Participating in the "Eight-nations allied army" to strike China during the Boxer Rebellion 9. The abuse of Chinese laborers 10. Conspiracy to invade the Northeast 11. Grabbing the Guangdong-Hubei Railway 12. Bribing Yuan Shikai 13. Being a loan shark 14. Supporting Yuan Shikai to be an emperor 15. Lansing-Ishii Agreement 16. New Banking Consortium 17. The Washington Conference 18. Manufacturing wars among warlords 19. Discovering unprecedented traitor Chiang Kai-shek 20. Connecting the U.S. with the Chiangs and the Soongs 21. Large-scale political aggression and economic aggression | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 22. Playing the "long-term thinking" 23. Floating the cotton and wheat loans 24. Winning dominance over the Chinese currency 25. Giving the Japanese invaders tools and capital to invade China 26. The Japan-US Memorandum of Understanding 27. Taking an opportunity to expand the aggression against China 28. Observing the fighting from afar in Emei Mountain 29. The establishment of hell on earth-SACO 30. Hurley's tricks 31. "Unification" of China 32. Fake negotiation, real troop-deployment 33. George Marshall's "mediation" 34. John Leighton Stuart directed an ugly drama 35. A blood debt 36. Dumping American goods in China, causing a disaster 37. Dominance by American capital 38. Sino-US Friendship, Commerce and Navigation Treaty 39. A bunch of treacherous documents 40. A complete record of crimes--the "White Paper" 41. Continuing to undermine the mainland with the direct occupation of Taiwan 42. Resisting the Americans and Aiding the DPRK, defending our homeland |
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The Birth of a Historical Orthodoxy

It boggles the mind of anybody outside China and North Korea that there should even be a question as to who started the Korean War on June 25, 1950. It was, of course, the mechanized and well-prepared divisions of the North Korean communist troops who launched a blitzkrieg against South Korea and crossed the 38th Parallel that divided the peninsula, engendering a chain of events that quickly escalated into a conflict of enormous carnage involving the militaries of more than two dozen nations.

Since the start of the Korean War, however, the Chinese communist state propaganda system has carried out a seven-decade campaign of falsehood on the causes of the conflict by blaming the United States and the U.S.-backed South Korean government, established in 1948 under President Syngman Rhee, for "invading" North Korea. ⁴ From the 1950s to the 1990s in China, this line of historical untruth was the only accepted narrative.

Over the past decade, the simple truth that it was actually North Korea (DPRK) who started the war with a blitzkrieg on the South could no longer be effectively denied within China. Some professional historians in China, many of whom have been able to travel and study abroad especially in the United States, have thus adopted a tactic of



simply stating: "On June 25, 1950, the Korean War broke out," without specifying who initiated the firing. But, curiously, no one in today's China is yet willing, or able, to directly challenge the orthodox misinterpretation that the South started the armed conflict.

The communist government fabricated that orthodoxy in 1950 and it is still the official position of the Chinese Communist Party. In the 2012 reprint of *A History of American Imperialism's Aggression in China*, the editors at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) Press specifically noted, "This book...has been out of print for a while [and we are reprinting it]. It was published in 1951...during the time of the Korean War and it reflects the historical background of the times. Although times have progressed and the Korean War background no longer exists, those historical facts contained in this book are still true. They do not change due to the change of the times."⁵

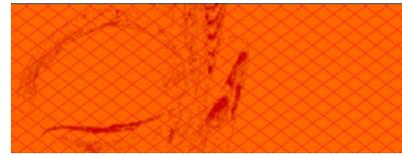
In today's China, in the most authoritative Party publication of the country, *The People's Daily*, which is under the direct aegis and editorial control of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, the *Party History* section still carries the official interpretation of "the Outbreak of the Korean War."⁶



(screen shot of *The People's Daily* official 'The Party History' on the "Breakout of the Korean War" source: *The People's Daily*)

According to this official statement from the Chinese Communist Party, the origins of the Korean War began as followed:

"At the dawn of June 25, 1950, the troops of South Korea's Syngman Rhee crossed the 38th Parallel and attacked the North, launching a surprise attack against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The people of North Korea were forced to rise up and resist the attack, hence the outbreak of the Korean War."⁷



But why and how would the militarily weaker South Korea take such an action of aggression against the North? "This war was deliberately planned and launched by the American imperialists," says *The People's Daily*. "For the DPRK, [this] was a war of resisting the U.S. and defending its nation."⁸

The People's Daily's view is taken directly from the official Chinese government statement issued three days after the war's outbreak. On June 28, 1950, Premier Zhou Enlai of the PRC issued a blatantly false statement: "The United States has ordered the troops of its puppet Syngman Rhee regime in South Korea to attack the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. This is a pre-meditated step taken by the United States, whose purpose is for the U.S. to find a pretext to invade Taiwan, [North] Korea, Vietnam and the Philippines."⁹

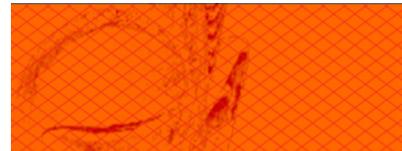
Events Leading to the Outbreak of the Korean War

Newly available archival documents illustrate the elaborate and complex preparations by the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the months leading to the June 25th outbreak of the Korean War.

For over two months, between December 1949 and February 1950, Mao Zedong was in Moscow, meeting and consulting with Stalin and other key USSR leaders in a comprehensive effort to seal the USSR-PRC alliance of the communist movement. Stalin and Mao's general agreement to create a division of labor and outline priorities in instigating communist revolutions worldwide was top on their agenda. Broadly speaking, the Soviet Union would be the leader of the worldwide communist movement, but would primarily focus its efforts in Europe and the new U.S.-led NATO alliance, while Mao's China, fresh from a stunning triumph over the U.S.-backed Kuomintang (KMT) Nationalist government, would primarily focus on supporting communist revolutions in East and Southeast Asia.

With this general agreement, Stalin let Mao set priorities of "making revolution" in Asia. Mao proposed two urgent areas for "liberation"—French Indochina and Taiwan. At the time, Ho Chi-minh was leading a small band of communists in the jungles of northern Vietnam against the French colonial regime. Taiwan was initially considered a top priority to China, but the Chinese communist troops had just suffered an unexpectedly humiliating defeat on the offshore island of Quemoy in an amphibious battle against the retreating KMT Nationalist troops under Chiang Kai-shek. It became apparent to Mao and Stalin that it would require much more preparation, including a naval and amphibious buildup, to "liberate" Taiwan.¹⁰

The choices of French Vietnam and Taiwan as Mao's top priorities for communist liberation were also prompted by a crucial factor: the unlikelihood of any U.S. intervention if the communists moved to take action in these regions. The Truman administration's policy toward French colonialism in French Indochina was not encouraging to the French government, and the chance of U.S. intervention on behalf of the French in the region was almost nonexistent. Although Taiwan was anti-communist, the Truman administration had virtually abandoned Chiang Kai-shek's [Republic of China (ROC)] government. On December 23, 1949, days after Mao Zedong arrived in



Moscow for his two-month stay in the USSR, the U.S. State Department instructed diplomats throughout East Asia that the U.S. government should not intervene in any events related to Taiwan, including the earnest preparation of military invasion by the CCP's People's Liberation Army (PLA). On January 5, 1950, the U.S. officially abandoned Formosa [Taiwan] by announcing that China [ROC] had sovereign right over Taiwan, in accordance with the 1943 Cairo Declaration, but that the United States would cease advising and providing military assistance to the Nationalist troops in Taiwan.¹¹

Unfortunately, this untimely announcement emboldened Mao's adventurism in leading the liberation movements in Taiwan and French Vietnam, which were Mao's top two priorities in leading the Asian revolution assigned by Stalin. In fact, Ho Chi-minh was hurriedly summoned to Moscow in January 1950 to meet with Stalin and Mao to discuss measures for a pending Chinese communist military assistance program. They also spoke about utilizing his Viet Minh forces in northern Vietnam to expel the French from Indochina. It was in Moscow that Mao ordered Liu Shaoqi and Zhou Enlai to gather PLA military logistics and personnel support for the Viet Minh and to prepare to move to Vietnam to fight the French. Mao selected two of his top generals, Chen Geng and Wei Guoqing, to lead a large PLA advisors' group to Ho's headquarters, dominating the small Viet Minh military force. Meanwhile, Mao also ordered General Su Yu, one of his able military strategists, to re-draw a battle plan to invade Taiwan through the development of an amphibious force pending Soviet naval assistance.

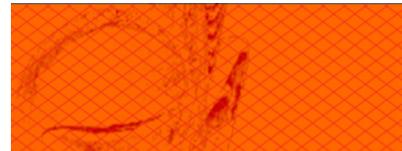
In letting Mao take the lead in Asian revolutions, however, Stalin set in motion a chain of events in Asia that would go beyond his initial calculations. As the indisputable core leader of the world communist movement, Stalin commanded enormous personal loyalty from, and power over, other communist leaders, including Mao Zedong. As the triumphant victor of a world war over fascism, the Soviet Union had also become the largest arsenal of the communist movement. As such, no major communist armed action worldwide could proceed without Stalin's approval or without the Soviet Union's supply of weapons and military technologies.

When Stalin approved Mao's choices of French Vietnam and Taiwan as the top two priority areas for communist military actions, he inadvertently ignored another hot spot where an ambitious communist leader was also advocating and preparing for his own war of liberation. That man was Kim Il-sung of the DPRK, a small communist regime recently established by the Soviet military occupation authority in September 1948.

Why did Kim Il-sung not focus on lobbying Mao Zedong instead of Stalin to include the liberation of South Korea on the priority list?

The answer can be explained in two aspects: First, Kim understood that Stalin, not Mao, was the ultimate authority of approval. As Kim frankly told Stalin's ambassador to Pyongyang, "He [Kim] himself cannot begin an attack [on South Korea] because he is a communist, a disciplined person, and for him the order of Comrade Stalin is law."¹²

Second, Kim did not need to gain approval from Mao because the blessing from his Chinese comrades had never been a major problem. In fact, Mao was equally enthusiastic about North Korea's attack on South Korea. In June 1949, before the Chinese communist forces took over China, as Kim explained to Stalin's ambassador to



Pyongyang, Mao Zedong had promised Kim Il-sung that once the Chinese communists took over China, (which they did four months later) Mao would give Kim assistance in liberating South Korea.¹³

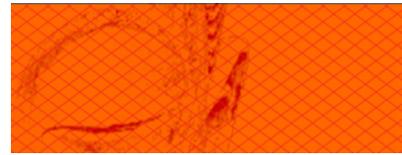
While Kim was relentlessly lobbying Stalin for his approval for the war, Kim never doubted that Mao would agree to his plan. He told the Russians that Mao Zedong was his friend and would always help Korea.¹⁴ Chinese friendship and military assistance had already been tangible and substantial: Kim's most combat-ready and best-equipped troops were the three ethnic Korean divisions of Mao's Chinese People's Liberation Army, totaling 37,000 troops, which Mao transferred to Kim's command in mid-April 1950.¹⁵

In fact, both Mao and Kim generally understood that an armed attack on South Korea was the only way to liberate and unify the Korean Peninsula. The only thing required was approval from Stalin, who needed to be convinced of the soundness of the attack. Specifically, Stalin was dubious about the unlikelihood of America's intervention in foiling Kim's planned attack. During his long stay in Moscow, Mao was on Kim's side, urging Stalin to approve Kim's plan. When Stalin directly asked him about Kim's intensified lobbying for approval, Mao gave his approval of Kim's plan with alacrity and further told Stalin that the United States would not interfere in an internal matter that the Korean people would decide for themselves.¹⁶

Consequently, Kim went full throttle to directly lobby Joseph Stalin to get on the priority list and wage a war of liberation and unification on the Korean peninsula by invading the U.S.-supported South Korean government of Syngman Rhee. Post-Soviet archival sources have clearly documented Kim's relentless petitions to Stalin for approval of a military strike against South Korea. Likewise, Stalin relentlessly refused Kim's requests.

The reasons for Stalin's rejection are not difficult to ascertain. First, unlike Taiwan and French Vietnam, the Soviet Union and the United States had divided the Korean Peninsula in the post-WWII years in a relatively orderly manner, without much unilateral bullheadedness by either country. In fact, it was the Soviet Red Army that had steadfastly observed the bilateral agreement reached in the waning days of World War II and had set the 38th Parallel as the dividing line for military occupation. By that agreement, the Soviets accepted the Japanese surrender north of the line, but did not cross into the south. Instead, they waited for U.S. troops to arrive and accept the Japanese surrender in the South. With tensions soaring in occupied Germany and Eastern Europe, escalating into the Berlin crisis and sabotaging various eastern bloc nationalist governments, the Soviet Union needed stability in Asia, especially on the Korean Peninsula. As a result, both the Soviets and Americans exited North and South Korea quietly in 1948, with their respective proxy governments in place in Pyongyang and Seoul.

Second, Stalin designated Mao to be in charge of communist revolutions in East and Southeast Asia, and, as such, Mao had gained the right to set priorities, to Kim's chagrin. Stalin could not just oblige Kim and agree to his request to take military actions against the South without Mao's blessing as well. But Mao, who sensed Stalin's hesitation and



rejection of Kim's adventurism, would not upset Stalin by unilaterally including the Korean conflict into his priority list even if he supported the action in principle.

Third, due to Korea's geographical proximity to America's core military presence in Japan, a military action by Kim against the South would likely prompt a swift and decisive military intervention by the United States, which had massive occupation forces a short distance away in Japan. Newly declassified confidential communications among Stalin, Kim, and Mao indicate Stalin's deep concerns over the high likelihood of a U.S. military intervention if Kim's plan was approved.

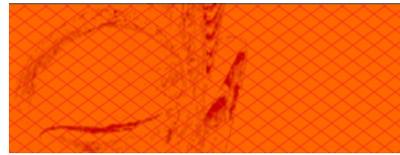
But Kim Il-sung's tireless lobbying for Stalin's approval for a decisive military action to invade the South went unabated. "Kim Il-sung is constantly nurturing his idea about an attack," Stalin's ambassador to Pyongyang reported to Moscow in mid-January 1950.¹⁷ Kim felt ignored and grew restless as Mao was invited for an extended two-month strategic session in the Soviet Union, along with Ho Chi-minh, another Asian comrade from Mao's top priority areas. "Lately I do not sleep at night, thinking about how to resolve the question of the unification of the whole country," Kim anxiously told Terenti Shtykov, Stalin's ambassador to Pyongyang, on January 17th.

Much has been made of Stalin's January 30, 1950 cable to Kim, which is known as his so-called "approval" for Kim's request to launch a war against South Korea. However, it is questionable that Stalin actually offered such an approval in this infamous cable. The entire cable via Shtykov, the Soviet ambassador in Pyongyang is as follows:¹⁸

1. I received your report. I understand the dissatisfaction of Comrade Kim Il Sung, but he must understand that such a large matter in regard to South Korea such as he wants to undertake needs large preparation. The matter must be organized so that there would not be too great a risk. If he wants to discuss this matter with me, then I will always be ready to receive him and discuss with him. Transmit all this to Kim Il Sung and tell him that I am ready to help him in this matter.

2. I have a request for Comrade Kim Il Sung. The Soviet Union is experiencing a great insufficiency in lead. We would like to receive from Korea a yearly minimum of 25,000 tons of lead. Korea would render us a great assistance if it could yearly send to the Soviet Union the indicated amount of lead. I hope that Kim Il Sung will not refuse us in this. It is possible that Kim Il Sung needs our technical assistance and some number of Soviet specialists. We are ready to render this assistance. Transmit this request of mine to comrade Kim Il Sung and ask him for me, to communicate to me his consideration on this matter.

From the text, it is clear that Stalin was not actually approving Kim's request for military action. Rather, he was granting Kim the opportunity to come to Moscow for a discussion on this weighty matter, which Stalin clearly believed to be too risky. At best, Stalin relented just a small amount in expressing willingness to hear what Kim had to tell him face-to-face, and agreed to measure the level of risk if Kim's gambit proceeded. Stalin's statement, "tell him that I am ready to help him in this matter," at the end of what is clearly a paragraph of grave caution and concern, should be interpreted as Stalin's plea for understanding of his sincerity in communist international brotherhood, but not necessarily an approval. Stalin could have also meant that he was helping Comrade Kim



and his Korean cause by rejecting Kim's request because he had seen the larger picture and concluded it was for the good of the Korean communists in the long-run to not take such a risk at the moment.

It is also very likely that the second paragraph was Stalin's condition for granting the honor to Kim to come to Moscow for a face-to-face meeting, as it is clearly a quid pro quo arrangement—*you will get to see me in person as long as you give me what I want: 25,000 tons of lead*—a deal too good for Kim to refuse.¹⁹

Did Kim Il-sung's trip to Moscow change Stalin's mind? There is little direct archival evidence to prove it one way or the other. But three things are clear: First, Stalin's resistance abated as he became in favor of building up Kim's military capability. He agreed to let North Korea use the approved Soviet credits slated for 1951 in advance in 1950, but Kim could now use them to buy arms and munitions for a military conflict; Second, Stalin remained unconvinced about U.S. non-intervention if the Soviet Union openly stood behind the Koreans in a war against the South. The U.S. government had become extremely belligerent against any Soviet actions in East Asia, especially in regions along China's borders.

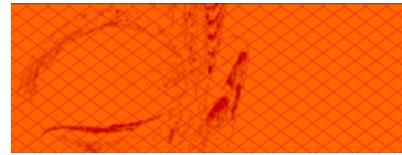
Washington further confirmed Stalin's belief. On January 12, 1950, Secretary of State Dean Acheson made a blistering speech at the National Press Club in Washington D.C., with three crucial and fateful messages: 1) the U.S. would absolutely oppose any Soviet attempts to aggrandize in East Asia, especially in China's Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, and Manchuria, which borders North Korea; 2) the U.S. would adopt a hands-off policy toward those countries in East Asia whose people wanted independence from foreign domination; and 3) the U.S. would adopt a defense perimeter excluding the Korean Peninsula and Taiwan.

The Acheson speech carried monumental weight in deciding the outcome of future developments in East Asia. It essentially stated that the U.S. would not take any military actions to intervene in the Korean Peninsula or the Taiwan Strait so long as the Soviet Union was not involved in those actions.

Historians have argued that Dean Acheson meant to drive a wedge between Beijing and Moscow. When Acheson made his famous speech, mainstream Washington establishment thinking had deemed Mao's Chinese Communist Party as non-communist nationalists, despite the fact that Mao Zedong was still in Moscow hobnobbing with the Soviet leaders. Washington considered the "real" communists.

For Stalin, the situation had changed dramatically in his favor. After the Acheson speech, all he had to do was unleash Kim Il-sung and start a proxy war against South Korea, but remain utterly secret about any Soviet involvement in the conflict. This explains the ultra-secrecy regarding the Soviet Union's massive military assistance during the war. By March, a constant influx of Soviet military personnel and advisors had arrived in North Korea to prepare for the assault.

Yet overall, Stalin's preoccupation in the Spring of 1950 was not Korea or even East Asia; Stalin's attention was instead directed toward Europe, where NATO had just been established, and East-West tensions had dramatically increased. In a secret meeting



between Stalin and Kim in Moscow in April 1950, Stalin told Kim, "The Korean comrades should not expect great assistance and support from the Soviet Union, because it has more important challenges to meet than the Korean problem."²⁰

Stalin's concerns were understandable. Because Stalin believed that "[Mao] had a good understanding of Oriental matters,"²¹ Stalin asked Mao to be more proactive in taking up the division of labor for making revolutions in East Asia. Consequently, Stalin ordered Kim to meet Mao first before starting his ten-day journey to Moscow in late March 1950, and before working out a coordination plan.

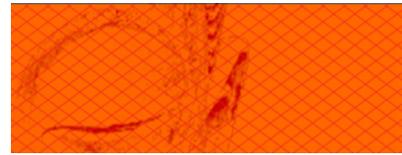
Kim, on the other hand, was reluctant to meet with Mao before meeting with Stalin because he feared that it would jeopardize his plan to be elevated to secondary consideration after Taiwan. Historian Shen Zhihua has convincingly proved, however, that Mao's meeting with Kim in Beijing was not to take place until May, after Kim's visit to Moscow.²²

Acheson's speech also complicated things for Mao. In light of Acheson's "hands-off" statement, Mao was excited about the opportunity Washington had just given him to "liberate" Taiwan, but he was also conflicted about Kim's zealous spirit in launching an attack in the Korean Peninsula ahead of his own Taiwan gambit. A military conflict in Korea might exhaust Soviet assistance and obviate his Taiwan invasion plan.

Acheson's speech also created difficulty for Kim. He suddenly realized his plan for attacking the South had become an issue neither Stalin nor Mao wanted to handle, now that the biggest fear of an American intervention had been greatly alleviated as a result of Washington's newly announced hands-off policies in Asia. Neither Stalin nor Mao would deny the necessity for Kim to invade the South, but considering the explosive U.S. belligerence toward any Soviet action in Asia that was referenced in the Acheson speech, Stalin did not want to be openly associated with Kim's actions for fear of being in direct conflict with the United States. As for Mao, support for Kim's gambit would compete with his own priority, a Taiwan invasion that had been declared by Acheson as a non-factor in provoking a U.S. intervention.

What ensued in May 1950 was something of a historical drama. Stalin ordered Kim to go ahead with the war preparation but insisted that Kim not proceed with the actual attack unless Kim had received Mao's approval first. Knowing Mao wanted to attack Taiwan first, Stalin might have been hoping that Mao would veto Kim's initiative or at least delay the plan until Taiwan was successfully "liberated." This would have saved Moscow from potential trouble in the Korean Peninsula, which was not Stalin's strategic priority. Mao, on the other hand, was hoping that Stalin would deny Kim's plan because of Taiwan's priority to China and due to Stalin's persistent doubt about the possibility of a U.S. intervention. In other words, Stalin and Mao both wanted the other party to handle the Kim issue.

However, none of these reasons and wishes was frankly discussed between Stalin and Mao. This created an atmosphere of suspicion between the two, and gave Kim enough leverage to manipulate both Moscow and Beijing.



Mao was unhappy about Kim's April 1950 visit to Moscow, which took place without Mao's prior approval. By May 1950, Mao was convinced that the details of Kim's attacks had already been secretly worked out between Stalin and Kim without his knowledge. Yet, in fact, no details had been arranged between Moscow and Pyongyang given that Stalin was waiting for Mao's approval of Kim's details before issuing a final approval.

On May 13, 1950, after his return from Moscow and on order from Stalin, Kim secretly travelled to Beijing to get Mao's final approval for his unification plan. While there, Kim skillfully exploited the ambiguities between Stalin and Mao. Prior to the meeting in Beijing, Mao wanted to ascertain whether Stalin and Kim had already made secret plans for the upcoming attack on South Korea without his knowledge. Mao asked Kim if he would like to make the visit public or secret, believing that if Kim wanted to discuss the details of the attack plan with Mao, he would make the trip in secret but if he did not want to discuss any details, Kim would make the visit known to the world.²³ Kim replied that he would make the trip in secret, indicating he had already made detailed plans with Stalin and it was just a matter of getting China's approval. However, during the official discussion on the day of his arrival in Beijing on May 13th, Kim told Mao and Zhou Enlai that he would not discuss any detailed plans or dates of the attack. He only told Mao and Zhou that Comrade Stalin fully supported him in his attack on the South. And as Stalin had ordered, Kim also mentioned that he would like to have the approval from Comrade Mao Zedong for the attack as well.

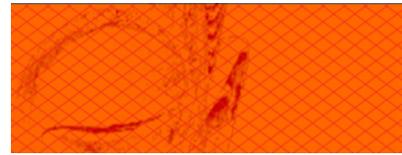
Stunned, Mao immediately ordered Zhou to get clarification and explanation directly from Stalin. Just before midnight on that day, Zhou saw Stalin's ambassador Nikolai Roshchin, who dispatched an urgent cable to Stalin immediately, relaying Mao's request for an "urgent answer" and "personal clarification" from Comrade Filippov [Stalin].²⁴ Within hours, in the early morning of May 14th, Stalin sent Mao his crucial answer, the full content of which is as follows:

"Comrade Mao Zedong!

In a conversation with the Korean comrades Filippov [Stalin] and his friends expressed the opinion that, in light of the changed international situation, they agree with the proposal of the Koreans to move toward reunification. In this regard a qualification was made that the question should be decided finally by the Chinese and Korean comrades together, and in case of disagreement by the Chinese comrades the decision on the question should be postponed until a new discussion. The Korean comrades can tell you the details of the conversation. Filippov. May 14, 1950"

In other words, Stalin had approved Kim's gambit, but he felt that the final decision should be made by Mao. That is to say, Stalin afforded Mao the historic opportunity to show his leadership in an Asian communist revolution, and even gave Mao an easy excuse to oppose Kim's plan since Stalin had indicated the Korean plan should be "postponed" if there was any disagreement by Mao.

Mao did not voice any meaningful dissent to Kim following Stalin's May 14th "personal clarification." In fact, Mao now realized that his own plan for "liberating" Taiwan was far less ready than Kim's plan to invade South Korea.²⁵ Historian Chen Jian writes,



"although Mao seemed to have some reservation, he never seriously challenged Kim's plans."²⁶

The USSR's Ambassador to China Roshchin reported to Stalin on May 14th:

*"Comrade Mao Zedong reported that in a conversation with him on the evening of May 13 the Korean comrades had informed him in detail about the situation in the country and about the conversation with you. He agreed with the assessments of the Korean comrades of the situation in North and South Korea and also with their assessment of the correlation of forces between the North and the South."*²⁷

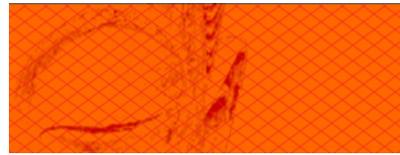
With full support obtained from Stalin and Mao in mid-May 1950, Kim Il-sung proceeded with his plans to breach the 38th parallel.

Conclusions on Korean War History and China's Historical Misrepresentations

Historians working in and on China often consider China's orthodox view that a massive South Korea invasion backed by the United States ignited the Korean War on June 25, 1950 as a dead horse not worth beating. As a result, this orthodoxy has not been openly challenged in China despite its preposterousness. Historical evidence, illustrated in this short paper, proves that the Korean War began on June 25, 1950 as a result of a long and arduous preparation and agreement among the three protagonists—Stalin, Mao, and Kim. To this day, China continues to deny its prior knowledge of and key role in the outbreak of the Korean War, a position that cannot stand the test of historical fact.

The manipulation of historical narratives in communist China is fundamentally rooted in the primal desire of all communists for self-assurance of ideological fulfillment. The late Chinese writer and renowned journalist Liu Binyan once commented with much poignancy that the Chinese Communist Party, since its founding in 1921, wasted enormous human and material resources, at the cost of tens of millions of Chinese lives, to convince the world of three falsehoods: 1) that the system of socialism and communism is infinitely superior to the system of democratic capitalism; 2) that the Chinese Communist Party is infallible, bestowed with a historical mission to fulfill the superior communist system; and 3) that global imperialism, led by the United States, is moribund and evil, with an insidious grand conspiracy to subvert and sabotage the communist movement led by the Chinese Communist Party, meaning that socialism and capitalism can never peacefully co-exist.²⁸

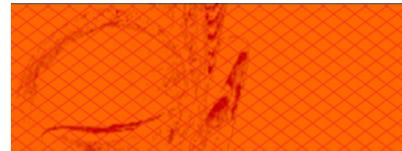
The communist state's strict devotion to creating these falsehoods is directly linked to Mao Zedong's ideological intoxication with Marxism and Leninism. "This [Marxism-Leninism] ideology is immeasurably superior to that of the Western bourgeoisie," wrote Mao in 1949. "The clinching proof of the effectiveness of this ideology is that Western bourgeois culture...was defeated the moment it encountered the new Marxist-Leninist culture, the scientific world outlook and the theory of social revolution, which the Chinese people had acquired."²⁹



According to Mao, the United States is designated as the primary enemy of Mao's superior ideology of Marxism and Leninism because the United States—as the bourgeois leader of the world—is far more cunning, successful, and ambitious in deceiving the Chinese proletariat with its culture of "democracy," "freedom," and "cultural infiltration." For a very long period, U.S. imperialism laid greater stress than other imperialist countries on activities in the sphere of spiritual aggression, extending from religious to 'philanthropic' and cultural undertakings, Mao announced.³⁰

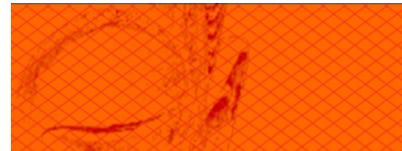
As a consequence, all history books on the Chinese-American relationship and cultural encounters have to be in the general direction of depicting the epic battle between a benign, virtuous, and innocent China, standing opposite the aggressive, slimy, bullying, and imperialistic United States. Or as Mao ordered, "The history of the aggression against China by U.S. imperialism, from 1840 when it helped the British in the Opium War to the time it was thrown out of China by the Chinese people, should be written into a concise textbook for the education of Chinese youth."³¹

The Chinese orthodoxy around the history of the Korean War is thus an integral part of this Maoist historical nihilism. As long as China refuses to abandon a Maoist view of history and a Marxist-Leninist dialectical materialism, historical misrepresentation will always be a matter of course and regime survival.



Endnotes

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- ¹ Schlesinger, Arthur Jr., "The Inscrutability of History," *Encounter Monthly*, (London: Encounter Ltd.), November 1966.
- ² *History of American Imperialism's Aggression in China* (刘大年, 美帝侵华史, 人民出版社) (Beijing: The People's Press, 1951).
- ³ Zhao Qingyun, "An Internal Debate between Zeng Yanxiu and Liu Danian over The History of American Imperialism's Aggression in China," November 30, 2009, *Studies of Modern China* (近代中国研究) Institute of Modern Chinese History, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, <http://jds.cass.cn/Item/8135.aspx>.
- ⁴ Liu Danian, *History of American Imperialism's Aggression in China*, Chapter 42.
- ⁵ CASS editor note (2012) on the reprint of 美帝侵华时.
- ⁶ Screen shot was taken on Feb. 27, 2017 at <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64165/66003/4463104.html>.
- ⁷ "June 25, 1950, the Korean War Broke Out," *The People's Daily*, Today in History, at <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64165/66003/4463104.html>. Website accessed May 22, 2017
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Yu, Miles M. "The Battle of Quemoy-The Amphibious Assault That Held the Postwar Military Balance in the Taiwan Strait," in *The Naval War College Review*, (Spring 2016), at <https://www.usnwc.edu/getattachment/66540c7b-a562-42af-8f30-14f5563b8d83/TheBattleOfQuemoy.aspx>.
- ¹¹ Zhang Yufa, *A History of the Republic of China* (中华民国史稿, 台北联经出版社) (Taipei: Lianching Press, p.550). For the text of the President's statement on Formosa, released by the White "House on January 5, 1950, see *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Harry S. Truman, 1950* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1965), pp. 11–12, or Department of State *Bulletin*, January 16, 1950, p. 79
- ¹² Telegram Shtykov to Vyshinsky on a luncheon at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK, January 19, 1950, full text in Woodrow Wilson Center's Digital Archive, at <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112135>.
- ¹³ Ibid. Shtykov reported to Moscow that "Kim underscored that Mao Zedong promised to render him assistance after the conclusion of the war in China."
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ They were Divisions 156, 164, and 166, belonging to the Marshal Lin Biao's Fourth Field Army. In all, there were about 100,000 PLA troops of Korean nationality by 1949. Chen Jian estimated



the actual number of returned Korean troops was 17,000. See Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War*, (Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 106.

¹⁶ Goncharov, Sergei and John W. Lewis, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao and the Korean War*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 130.

¹⁷ Telegram, Shtykov to Vyshinsky on a luncheon at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK, January 19, 1950.

¹⁸ Telegram, Stalin to Shtykov, January 30, 1950, in Wilson Center's Digital Archive, at <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112136>.

¹⁹ The same day Shtykov reported back to Stalin Kim's jubilation as follows:
"Kim Il Sung received my report with great satisfaction. Your agreement to receive him and your readiness to assist him in this matter made an especially strong impression. Kim Il Sung, apparently wishing once more to reassure himself, asked me if this means that it is possible to meet with Comrade Stalin on this question. I answered that from this communication it follows that Comrade Stalin is ready to receive you. Kim Il Sung further stated that he will prepare himself for the meeting.

Regarding the question of delivering lead from Korea to the USSR, I read the second point of your order. Kim answered that he will take all necessary measures to secure the delivery to the USSR from Korea of the quantity of lead indicated by you. He promised to work out all necessary measures regarding this question in the course of 10-15 days."

See <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112036>.

²⁰ Goncharov and Lewis, *Uncertain Partners*, p. 144.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Shen Zhihua, *Mao Zedong, Stalin and the Korean War: The Most Secret Archives of the USSR and PRC* (华，毛泽东，斯大林与韩战：中苏最高机密档案)," (Hong Kong: Tianditushu Press, 1998). p.218-9

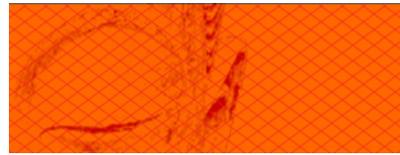
²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Cable from Roshchin to Stalin, relaying Mao's request for clarification on North Korea taking action against South Korea, May 13 1950, in the Wilson Center's Digital Archive, at <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115977>.

²⁵ Mao's troops suffered a devastating blow in the October 1949 battle of Quemoy. In December 1949, just before Mao's trip to see Stalin, Mao's task force of the Taiwan invasion scraped a plan to invade Taiwan due to lack of air and naval capabilities. In June 1950, days before the outbreak of the Korean War, lack of military readiness forced Mao forced to postpone another plan to invade Taiwan until the summer of 1951. See Yu, Miles M. "The Battle of Quemoy," in *The Naval War College Review*, (Spring 2016).

²⁶ Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War*. p. 112.

²⁷ Cipher telegram, Roshchin to Stalin, May 14, 1950, in the Wilson Center's Digital Archive, at <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114900.pdf?v=d41d8cd98f00b204e9800998ecf8427e>.



²⁸ Wang Kang, "The Legacy of Liu Binyan, (刘宾雁的遗产)," in *Essays in Memory of Liu Binyan* (刘宾雁纪念文集), p.494.

²⁹ Mao Zedong, "Farewell, John Leighton Stuart," in *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, p. 373

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 365.

³¹ *Ibid.*