

China's strategies and policies towards the three Indochinese countries in the period 1949-1954

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Abstract: On October 1, 1949, the People's Republic of China declared its establishment in the context of the Cold War, with a hot war taking place on China's border—the Indochina War. In that complex context, Indochina was China's traditional sphere of influence and security shield. Therefore, the problem for China was how to protect the newly established young state while creating a peaceful and stable environment both domestically and internationally for economic development. Moreover, China also wanted to establish diplomatic relations with Western countries to utilize capital, science, and technology to develop the economy and modernize the country. China needed a solution to the Indochina problem to achieve the aforementioned goals. The article will analyze the interests of significant countries towards the Indochina region since World War II, examine the situation in China to understand what China's goals were during this period, and the measures China took towards the three Indochina countries to clarify the picture of China's policy towards these countries from 1949 to 1954.

Keywords: *Cold war, China, Indochina, Policy, Vietnam.*

1. Introduction

After the end of World War II, the United Nations established its mission to contribute to protecting world peace. However, soon after that, the world entered a period of confrontation between two systems: Capitalism led by the United States and Socialism led by the Soviet Union. On the US side: With an economy that gained much profit during World War II and favorable and safe conditions for participation in the war, after the war, the US was not like other European countries that were heavily devastated but also rose to become the world's leading economy. Moreover, that was also an important premise for the US to implement its global strategy. The US took measures to attract allied countries (Western Europe) through economic aid measures (the Marshall Plan) as well as forming military alliances (ANZUS, SEATO, NATO...).

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union, as the first socialist state in the world, was constantly growing and was considered the only force that could counterbalance the role of the United States. In response to the actions of the United States, the Soviet Union carried out economic aid activities and military alliances to counter the threats of the United States and its allies. Therefore, although this was the Cold War period, hot wars still occurred in many places (Korean War; Indochina War). In addition, after World War II, the Indochina region became a place of strategic competition between major countries.

Faced with such an international context, more than ever, China needs a stable Indochina region for the Indochina region to confidently develop its economy after long years of war, civil war, and natural disasters. Because Indochina is China's traditional sphere of influence, whether Indochina is stable will directly affect China. That is why China needs to take cautious steps towards the countries in this region, as shown through "China's policy towards the three Indochinese countries (1949-1954).

2. Research Methods and Theories

To carry out the article, the author uses historical and logical methods. Scholars use historical methods to study the historical process of the Indochina region and the role of Indochina in countries such as the United States, the Soviet Union, England, and France—a logical approach to identifying the characteristics of China's foreign policy.

In addition, the article also applies some theories of international relations, such as regionalism to perceive the importance of the Indochina region to major countries since World War II, and realism to explain the measures that China implemented towards the three Indochina countries in the period 1949-1954.

3. Research Results

3.1. *The Strategic Significance of the Indochina Region for China*

3.1.1. *Overview of Indochina Region*

Three countries—Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia—form Indochina, which occupies a region in mainland Southeast Asia North Bordering China, West Bordering Myanmar and Thailand, and East Bordering the East Sea (Vietnam alone has a long coastline).; South: Bordering the Gulf of Thailand and part of the East Sea. This area has an important strategic position, bridging Southeast Asia, China, and the Indian Ocean region. Despite historical and ethnic differences, French colonialism influenced the three Indochinese countries for a long time, and they share many similarities in geography and culture. Since the 17th century, Catholic missionaries have played a pioneering role in expanding the influence of European colonialism. In 1624, French missionary Alexandre de Rhodes arrived in Vietnam, staying for 17 years to spread Catholicism while building influence for France. During the same period, priest Louis Chevreuil of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith came to the Bat-sac area (Cambodia) to preach and attract people to Catholicism.

Later, through priest Pigneau de Béhaine, France directly intervened in Vietnam's internal affairs by supporting Nguyen Anh in the war against the Tay Son dynasty. In 1855, taking advantage of Cambodia's difficult situation under pressure from Siam, France sent representatives to contact the Cambodian court to establish relations and prepare to turn the country into a colony. In Vietnam, on September 1, 1858, using the Hue court as an excuse for mistreating Catholic priests and refusing France's commercial demands, the French colonialists opened fire on the Son Tra peninsula (Da Nang). In 1862, France forced the Nguyen dynasty to sign a peace treaty ceding three provinces in Eastern Cochinchina. Then, in 1867, France occupied the remaining three provinces in Western Cochinchina, placing the entire Cochinchina under colonial rule, gradually moving towards annexing all of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. In Cambodia, on August 11, 1863, King Norodom was forced to sign a treaty recognizing French protection. In 1897, Governor-General of Indochina Paul Doumer continued to strip the king of his remaining powers, establishing a colonial regime in Cambodia. In 1887, France established the Indochinese Federation, consisting of Vietnam and Cambodia. 1893, after annexing Laos, France continued to divide Laos into two regions, North and South, and then merged them into one country, Indochina, in 1899. The French colonial administration divided the Indochinese Federation into five regions: Tonkin, Annam, Cochinchina, Laos, and Cambodia. Each region was ruled according to different policies to divide and tightly control each country. The head of the Indochinese Federation was the Governor-General of Indochina, representing the French government in ruling the entire region.

As World War II ended, the people of Indochina took advantage of the opportunity to rise and gain independence. However, shortly after, the French colonialists returned to invade the three Indochinese countries again. Faced with this situation, the three peoples of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia continued to unite to fight against the domination of French colonialism, opening a period of fierce struggle to regain national sovereignty.

3.1.2. *The role of the Indochina Region in China*

Geographically: The three Indochinese countries are neighboring countries of China, with convenient transportation by road, river, and sea. Historically, Indochina was the gateway for China to advance into Southeast Asia.

Regarding the economy, Vietnam and other countries on the Indochina peninsula are tropical countries with many resources that China does not have or has very little of the book, A Nam Chi Nguyen, wrote: "... The land there (Vietnam) is fertile and suitable for growing rice, mulberry, and raising animals. Salt is white and clean as snow. Pheasant wings are beautiful red. Gold is available in Phu Luong and Quang Uyen. Bright pearls are available in Tinh an and Van Don. Coral and tortoise shells are available in the sea. Two-season rice, eight batches of silkworms each year [1]. The Chinese dynasties, from the Qin to the Qing dynasties, repeatedly launched wars of aggression against Vietnam also to seize the resources of the Vietnamese people. Forcing the Vietnamese people to pay tribute with ivory, rhinoceros' horn, cinnamon, bird's nest, silk, and many other valuable goods, cargo, and seafood.

Politically, Chinese dynasties considered China as a "heavenly kingdom" with the mission of "ruling all nations" and considered the Han people as a "superior nation" with the mission of "opening the ignorant hearts" for the Vietnamese people to be indoctrinated into religion (!). China considers the three countries in Indochina to be Chinese territory and must be within China's sphere of influence [1].

Militarily, the three Indochinese countries act as buffer zones, a "shield" protecting China in the South. However, more broadly, the Indochina region and the Pacific and Indian Oceans – which border these three countries – are important strategic crossroads, connecting Asia with Europe and Africa and from Asia to Oceania.

Controlling Indochina means controlling the East Sea, the Paracel and Spratly Islands, and other key locations in the South Pacific. Gaining control over Indochina equates to dominating the East Sea, the Paracel and Spratly Islands, and other strategic locations in the South Pacific. Indochina plays a crucial role in China's strategy for expansion and global dominance. In the short term, it strengthens China's influence in the power struggle with the US and Japan while simultaneously exerting pressure on Southeast and South Asian nations. Besides, Indochina is an area with a sizeable Chinese population. The Indochina Peninsula, first of all, Vietnam, is the first land in Southeast Asia to receive Chinese immigrants. The first relatively massive wave of Chinese immigration to Vietnam was associated with the invasion of Qin Shi Huang. In 214, the Qin Dynasty mobilized nearly half a million troops to invade Northern Vietnam. They aimed to expand their territory, exert political pressure, and influence Southeast Asian trade [2]. From the 7th century (under the Tang Dynasty 618-907), the Angkor Kingdom became a vassal state in China and had to pay tribute to the Chinese dynasties yearly. This relationship created favorable conditions for merchants and free migrants to flood the country. According to historical records from the 11th century onwards (the prosperous period of the Angkor Kingdom), many Chinese immigrant populations appeared in this country [2]. Many reasons have promoted the wave of Chinese migration to Indochina since the Qin Dynasty. Among them, we can mention factors such as natural disasters, crop failures, famine, epidemics, the dynamism and efficiency in commercial activities of overseas Chinese merchants, and political upheavals due to power struggles between Chinese feudal dynasties. In addition, the policy of expansion and assimilation by force, through wars of aggression launched by Chinese feudal dynasties against Southeast Asian countries, also contributed to promoting this wave of migration. In addition, local governments in many Southeast Asian countries had policies to attract and use Chinese merchants and artisans to serve economic development. Since the second half of the 19th century, the intense penetration of capitalism into the economic, social, and political life of China and Southeast Asian countries has created a new wave of migration, significantly increasing the number of Chinese people settling in the Indochina region.

3.2. *Major Countries' Viewpoints on The Indochina War*

After World War II, significant countries were interested in the Indochina region, although each country's calculations differed.

Indochina is an area of significant economic and political significance for the United States. Economically, many times in the American media, the viewpoints expressing this have been published. The American and World News issue of January 28, 1949, revealed the desire: Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos are rich in strategic materials necessary for the war industry, especially tin, antimony, and tungsten, which are the types of metals that America lacks; [3]. Politically, Dulles declared, " The strategic value (of Indochina) is enormous. Indochina has the most important naval and air bases; [3]. President Truman said: " America's defense is in Korea, Taiwan, and Indochina [3]. Because of the geopolitical and economic importance of the Indochina region, the risk of France's defeat in Indochina inevitably worried the United States. What the United States feared was that if the Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian people's revolutions were victorious in their struggle for independence, the people of other colonies and dependencies, especially in Southeast Asia, would follow that example and promote the national liberation movement in Southeast Asia. President Eisenhower, in his speech at the annual conference of US governors on 21-1953, declared: " If Indochina is lost, Burma cannot be defended, and Malaysia will no longer exist. We will no longer be able to receive rubber and tungsten from Indochina. (Wolfram) that we need anymore. India will be invaded, and the free world will no longer be able to keep the rich Indochina " [3]. It was because of the danger that communism would quickly cover the Southeast Asian region that the US had to intervene quickly to prevent Southeast Asia from falling into the hands of communism.

For Britain: Britain had many colonies in Southeast Asia, and this was the leading rice supplier to the British Hong Kong market. Therefore, the British Conservative Party Government feared that Western military intervention would force China to respond similarly, causing the war in Indochina to become another Korean War, possibly leading to a world war.

For France: After years of waging war in Indochina, France became deeply entangled in the conflict. The prolonged war drained its strength, leading to a severe economic and social crisis. Continuous civil unrest and a growing anti-war movement among the French people further intensified the situation. As a result, the French authorities faced internal divisions and uncertainty, their resolve to continue the invasion weakened, and the inclination to seek a resolution through negotiations became increasingly prominent.

For the Soviet Union: During this period, the Soviet Union had just completed economic recovery and entered the development stage. The Soviet Union needed peace to build the country and consolidate the Eastern European region, which was vital to the Soviet Union. Therefore, the Soviet Union had to fight for world peace. The focus of the Soviet Union's strategy was to fight against the revival of German fascism in Europe. In this regard, the Soviet Union needed to win over France: During the years 1953-1954, Soviet propaganda focused mainly on EDC comments and the danger of German rearmament " [4]. Besides, in 1953, Stalin died (March 1953), and Khrushchev took his place and began to lead the Soviet Union towards a negative right-wing path, reconciling with the West.

3.3. Situation in China from 1949 to 1954

3.3.1. On Foreign Affairs

After founding the People's Republic of China, it had only established diplomatic relations with 17 countries; eight countries—Pakistan, Britain, Ceylon, Norway, Israel, Afghanistan, Finland, and the Netherlands were preparing to establish diplomatic relations. Four countries—Britain, Norway, the Netherlands, and Finland—were still negotiating establishing diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. The relationship between the People's Republic of China was mainly with the countries in the socialist camp. Among them, Vietnam was the country with the closest relationship with China. Before 1949, China had become the base of the Vietnamese revolution. On the contrary, during the time the Chinese people waged the war of liberation, the northern border of Vietnam had become the base of the grassroots Party organizations and armed forces of the Communist Party of China [5].

3.3.2. Internally

Security-political issues: Mainland China, mainly the South China and Southwest regions, was still occupied by Chiang Kai-shek's army. China had not yet liberated Tibet, and instability persisted due to the disruptive activities of bandits and agents. The urgent task of the revolutionary government was to quickly eliminate the remnants of the old regime and build and consolidate the government at all levels throughout the country [6]. Economically: The Chinese economy at that time was a backward agricultural economy because after many years of war and natural disasters had seriously destroyed agricultural and industrial production, the lives of rural and urban residents faced many difficulties. Therefore, the problem facing China at that time was to restore the economy, stabilize people's lives, and reform land to create conditions for the subsequent development step, which was to advance to socialism. Regarding social culture: After the People's Republic of China declared its establishment, 55 ethnic minorities at that time accounted for 6% of the population but lived on 60% of China's territory [6]. In general, in the regions where many unequal social relations still exist, hostile forces have taken advantage of the underdeveloped state of these regions to conduct sabotage activities, causing division between ethnic minorities and the revolutionary government. Authorities have carried out reform work in these regions very cautiously. The main task of reform is to abolish the oppressive and exploitative regime of slavery and feudalism, liberating social productive forces. Based on the above situation, China implemented a "one-sided island" policy in foreign affairs, leaning towards the Soviet Union and socialist countries. In domestic affairs, the Chinese government advocated spending three years to restore the post-war economy, stabilize people's lives, consolidate the revolutionary government, carry out democratic reforms, and create conditions for the subsequent development steps.

3.4. China's Goals in the Period 1949-1954

To meet the practical needs of the domestic and international situation, China defined its goals for the period 1949-1954 through the following key aspects:

3.4.1. First, prevent US Intervention in the Indochina Region

Chairman Mao Zedong and the Chinese leaders believed that: "The birth of a new China will make imperialism unwilling to see its defeat in this country; thus it will carry out military intervention in this country as it did to the Soviet state after the Bolshevik revolution" [7]. Right in the enlarged session of the Politburo in January 1949, the issue of the risk of US military intervention in China became the central issue discussed and also in this session Mao concluded that: "We must draw up a war plan, we must take into account the US government sending troops to occupy coastal cities as well as fighting us directly. We should prepare to deal with it from now on to avoid surprise when it happens" [7]. Because of the fear of being attacked by the United States, the risk was that the United States would replace France in the war in Indochina and with a Vietnam war right on the Chinese border. China's top priority was to prevent the United States from intervening in this region.

3.4.2. Create a Peaceful and Stable Environment for Development

At that time, the newly established People's Republic of China had not yet consolidated its regime, and its domestic economy faced many difficulties. More than ever, China needed a peaceful environment to restore the country and develop the economy. If war broke out, it would be difficult for China to maintain the newly won regime. During a meeting with Marshal Stalin in Moscow on December 19, 1950, Chairman Mao Zedong also affirmed that: "China needs a period of three to five years of peace and stability to restore the economy to the pre-war stage and unify the whole country" [7]. Therefore, China's policy during this period must first ensure China's domestic needs.

3.4.3. Expand Diplomatic Relations with Countries Around the world to Develop the Economy

With the policy of "one border island" in this period, China's relations were mainly with the Soviet Union and the countries in the socialist bloc: "Outside, we must unite and fight together with all

countries in the world, countries that treat us fairly and unite with the people of all countries. Those countries are allied with us – the Soviet Union, the people's democratic countries, with the proletariat and establishing a united international front. We must learn to one side" [7]. However, Mao Zedong himself also realized that in order to develop the Chinese economy, it was necessary to establish diplomatic relations with Western countries: "To build our country into a powerful socialist state, we must not only unite with domestic forces but also create a favorable international environment, must unite with all forces in the world that we can unite with." [8]. By leaning towards the Soviet Union and socialist countries, China still wants to seek opportunities to cooperate with countries, especially Western countries, to develop its economy.

3.5. Measures Taken by China towards the Three Indochinese Countries

3.5.1. China Aided Vietnam in its Resistance War Against France

During the period when Vietnam waged its resistance war against France, China provided Vietnam with much assistance, such as weapons, food, medicine, military training, human resource training, etc. Although the reasons why China helped Vietnam included the division of tasks between the Soviet Union and China, the spirit of proletarian internationalism, or the goal of ensuring security in the South of China, the results of that assistance helped Vietnam overcome many difficulties - especially during the period when Vietnam was almost isolated from other countries in the world. Specifically, as follows:

Economic aid: The value of the goods China delivered to Vietnam for trade considered as aid (excluding the military part) in 1951-1952 was 23,405 million VND; in 1953, it was 52,090 million VND; in 1954 it was worth about 200 million VND [9]. From 1950 to 1954, China provided Vietnam with economic aid in goods valued at approximately 275,495 million VND (excluding the value of rice). According to Chinese statistics, from 1950 to 1954, China provided economic aid to Vietnam worth 176 million yuan [9]. China also contributed to solving Vietnam's food problems. In early 1950, despite having just been liberated and facing many difficulties, especially in the South China region, China provided Vietnam with 2,634 tons of rice, contributing to solving Vietnam's food problems. From 1950 to 1954, although China tried its best to participate in the resistance against the US and aid to Korea, the amount of rice aid to Vietnam remained. In 1951, it was 4,210 tons; in 1952, it was 150 tons; in 1953, it was 1,810 tons. During the Dien Bien Phu campaign, the amount of rice China provided to Vietnam was 1,700 tons, accounting for 6.52% of the total demand [10]. In the field of training and education of cadres and students, The Chinese government provided more than 500,000 yuan in funding to build two extensive training facilities in China, the Nanning campus and the Guilin campus. By the end of 1954, nearly 4,000 Vietnamese students had gone to study and train in China [9]. By the end of 1950, two regiments of the 308th division, one regiment of the 312th division, two battalions of engineers, and Vietnamese army officers went to China to study, receive military training, and receive weapons [9]. In the military field: In April 1950, Vietnam sent two regiments of the 308th division along the Ha Giang route through Mong Tu (Yunnan), one regiment of the 312th division along the Cao Bang route through Hoa Dong (Guangxi) to equip two other Vietnamese regiments that were currently dealing with the enemy [11]. To ensure logistics for Vietnamese troops on Chinese soil to aid Vietnamese troops, on June 8, 1950, the General Logistics Department of the People's Liberation Army of China established an office in Nanning, helping Vietnam mobilize weapons from the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. During the Dien Bien Phu campaign, China provided 3,600 105mm artillery shells, accounting for 18% of the total artillery used in the complex and urgent campaign [12]. China has transferred an additional 7,400 105mm bullets to the Vietnamese army. According to Chinese statistics, during the Dien Bien Phu campaign, China provided Vietnam with more than 200 cars, 10,000 barrels of oil, more than 3,000 guns of various types, 2,400,000 bullets, more than 100 artillery pieces of various types, more than 60,000 artillery pieces and rockets, 1,700 tons of food, in addition to a large number of medical drugs, weapons, and explosives [12]. In addition to weapons and equipment, China also sent a 281-member military, political, and economic advisory delegation led by La Quy Ba, a member of the Party Central Committee and Chairman of the Fuzhou City Military Management Committee.

3.5.2. *China and the Chinese Problem*

A Chinese proverb affirms that there are Chinese people in every region with people on this earth. That also partly shows the immense force of Chinese people living in foreign lands. Therefore, in this period, to increase the trust of the Indochinese countries in particular and Southeast Asia in general, the leaders of Beijing also took breakthrough steps in this issue. From before until the time after the declaration of founding, China had not made any official statement on the issue of the nationality of overseas Chinese. In their speeches, the Chinese leaders always spoke up to defend themselves: " We will not forgive any act of humiliation or injustice towards our compatriots in foreign lands " [13]. In 1954, Premier Zhou Enlai introduced what many regards as the first initiative concerning overseas Chinese. He stated: "In the past, reactionary Chinese governments never attempted to address the nationality issue of overseas Chinese. The nationality issue of overseas Chinese not only placed Chinese communities in difficult situations but also frequently became a major source of conflict between China and host countries. We are willing to resolve the overseas Chinese issue to improve this situation, starting with Southeast Asian countries with our relations." [13]. The Chinese government has called on Chinese who have acquired citizenship in their host countries to respect the laws, customs, and religions of the countries in which they reside and encourage them to speak the local languages, marry local people, and become good citizens. Those still retaining Chinese citizenship should not participate in political activities in their host countries. Premier Zhou Enlai emphasized this: " We do not encourage communist parties or other democratic parties of overseas Chinese... (if they want) to participate in political parties, they should return to China. However, they cannot be allowed to do so locally: this will lead to misunderstanding in the countries in which they reside " [13].

3.5.3. *China's Efforts to Neutralize the Indochina Region*

As a donor to Vietnam, China joined Vietnam at the 1954 Geneva Conference. Before the Geneva Conference, Vietnam, the Soviet Union, and China had meetings to agree on issues of principle: 1. Opponents rejected separating the Laos and Cambodia issues for separate resolutions.; 2. Political and ceasefire issues must be resolved simultaneously, but the issue of ceasefire can be discussed first; 3. At the same time as France ended its hostile actions in Indochina, the US must also stop transporting weapons and ammunition to Indochina [14]. However, during the negotiations, China and the Soviet Union simultaneously made concessions on all three of the key issues mentioned above. One example was their compromise on the demand for Pathet Lao and Khmer Ixala representation and their agreement to discuss the issues of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia together rather than separately. In the first session, Prime Minister Pham Van Dong advocated including Pathet Lao and Khmer Ixala representatives. According to the viewpoint of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam: "The Vietnamese, Khmer, and Lao people have united to fight under the leadership of the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the Khmer Resistance Government, and the Pathet Lao Resistance Government. So, officials must discuss that matter with the official representatives of those three governments. [15]. However, when Western countries do not share the same opinion with Vietnam because they think: " Cambodia and Laos have no problem to discuss. If there is a problem, it is because the Viet Minh army invaded. All that is needed is for the invading Viet Minh army to withdraw from those two places [15].

Faced with the West's attitude, Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov, in the May 17 meeting, raised the military issue that should be resolved first, so the issue of representation of the Pathet Lao and Khmer Itsala was put aside [4]. However, the Viet Minh side remained steadfast in its view that Indochina was a united front and that representation from the Laotian Resistance Government and the Khmer Itsala was necessary. However, on May 20, in a conversation with Eden, the head of the Chinese delegation agreed to separate military issues from political issues, as political issues in the three Indochinese countries differed. Besides the problem of the ceasefire, Britain, France, and America all believed that the three Indochinese countries were different in terms of territory and the vibrancy of the battlefield. Hence, the ceasefire had to be implemented differently. Regarding the political solution in parallel with the military, Britain, France, and the United States all advocated not discussing the

military and political issues in parallel, believing that the conference mainly focused on the ceasefire issue; a political solution at this time was "a bit premature"; a political solution would be discussed separately from the military solution; Leaders did not have to apply the political solution to the whole of Indochina. The issues of Laos and Cambodia had to be considered separately from Vietnam. According to the viewpoint of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, "the issue of restoring peace in Indochina must include both political and military issues. These two issues are closely related and cannot be separated" [15]. However, when the French did not accept that, China and the Soviet Union, in order to make progress in the conference, agreed to separate military issues from political discussions: "Molotov made this proposal in the limited session on May 17 and Zhou Enlai remarked to Eden on May 20 that we should give priority to a ceasefire" [4]. Regarding the issue of general elections and the time limit for general elections, the US, from the beginning, opposed free general elections to unify Vietnam. When the US could not prevent the general elections, it tried to delay them as long as possible. Because the US understood that general elections would only benefit the Viet Minh, the Figaro newspaper on May 15 and 16 (an article by Bernard Ullman from Hanoi) wrote: "People believe that if there were free elections, Ho Chi Minh would receive 90 to 95% of the votes. [15]. The French repeatedly raised the issue of general elections but without a time limit. (The constitutions set the election dates in Laos and Cambodia as August and September 1955, respectively). However, officials set the election date as June 1955. It was possible to rely on an agreement between the governments of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam to choose a date. In China, in talks with the British delegation, Li Ke Nong argued for a specific date but said that his government was willing to set the date within two or three years from the ceasefire.

3.5.4. On the Issue of Military Demarcation

In the Liuzhou meeting, the leaders of Vietnam and China discussed the issue of demarcation, the viewpoint of General Vo Nguyen Giap: "Currently, Pham Van Dong is proposing the 13th or 14th parallel. Vo Nguyen Giap thinks that we can retreat step by step, but the 16th parallel is the final limit" [14] but when entering the conference, when Western countries pressured China, Vietnam had to accept the 17th parallel as a temporary military demarcation line. We want the 16th parallel because, between the 16th and 17th parallels, there is National Highway 9 connecting Laos to the Sea of Vietnam. Prime Minister Pham Van Dong wanted to keep it so the Viet Minh could support the Pathet Lao forces. However, after a private meeting between the new French prime minister and foreign minister Pierre Mendes-Francé and Zhou Enlai, Zhou supported their position [16]. For Laos, officials also raised the issue of dividing the country along longitude or latitude. Laos' most substantial resistance bases were in the Central or Southern regions, especially in the two provinces of Attapeu and Xa-ra-van and on the Bo-loven plateau. Finally, China supported the selection of two assembly areas, Sam-Nua and Phong-Xa-Ly, in which Phong-Xa-Ly province bordered China, creating conditions for China to have the opportunity to contact Lao revolutionaries with whom China had not had relations for a long time [16].

3.6. Results of China's Policy towards the Three Indochinese Countries 1949-1954

3.6.1. For China

First, as a country that provided aid to Vietnam, China became an ally of Vietnam at the Geneva negotiations. This conference brought China benefits: China eliminated the risk of intervention by Western countries, especially the United States, in the Indochina region. This avoided the risk of China directly confronting the United States in Indochina, ensuring the safety of China's southern border. Moreover, with Vietnam, half of the South following the West, and the other half an ally of China, it also created a safe buffer zone for China. As for Laos and Cambodia, the Lao and Cambodian governments pledged not to allow foreign military bases on their territories unless they faced security threats. Moreover, especially in the case of Laos, France still kept two bases: one in Se No and one in the Mekong River valley. For China, that meant that the Kingdom of Laos continued entrusting part of its

defense to France, not the United States. In addition, external powers restricted the armaments of the three Indochinese countries. Neither of the two Vietnamese zones was allowed to import weapons from outside to strengthen its military potential. On the contrary, Laos and Cambodia could import weapons, ammunition and military equipment from outside to the extent necessary to defend their territory. Finally, while authorities forbade both Vietnamese zones from recruiting new military personnel from outside, they allowed Laos to retain 1,500 French officers and non-commissioned officers to help train its army (which, for China, seemed to eliminate the need for American advisers).

Additionally, they permitted Cambodia to receive foreign advisers necessary for its defense. For China, these were the same provisions that prohibited American military involvement in the Indochina peninsula either directly (bases) or indirectly (military advisers and arms transfers) [17]. Taking the Ben Hai River, the 17th parallel as the dividing line between Vietnam, also created a safe buffer zone for China. Making concessions on the Indochina issue to seek compromise with the West aimed to achieve economic and diplomatic benefits, specifically increasing China's international position, improving relations with the West, and regaining a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. The most concrete result was that Britain and China agreed on June 17 to exchange charge d'affaires ad interim.

Second, China's international position, in general, and in the community of socialist countries, has been raised.

Third, create a peace-loving national image through the Chinese issue.

However, the issue of China's aid to the Vietnam War came at a time when the People's Republic of China was born, and the economic situation was still challenging after years of war, civil war, and natural disasters. Moreover, immediately after that, China participated in the "resistance to the US and aid to Korea" campaign, which cost a lot of human and material resources. Therefore, China's aid to the Vietnam War brought a huge economic burden to China.

3.6.2. For the People of the Three Indochinese Countries

China's policy towards the three Indochinese countries has positive and negative implications. Positive: With aid to Vietnam, China has materially and spiritually helped Vietnam. Materially, China helped Vietnam solve the shortage of food, weapons, and ammunition, trained Vietnamese cadres, provided economic advice to Vietnam, and helped the Vietnamese revolution mature quickly. Spiritually, China has helped Vietnam join the community of socialist countries, along with the support of the people of the world for the struggle for national liberation of the Vietnamese people. Regarding the Chinese issue during this period, China showed a moderate attitude. Especially towards Vietnam, during the period when the relationship between the two countries was quite warm, the Chinese issue also took place quite smoothly. This contributed to the political stability of the Southeast Asian region in general and the Indochina region in particular. However, China's policy also brought negative consequences: China's participation in the Geneva Conference and its interests, and China compromised with the West, which greatly affected the national liberation process of the people of the three Indochinese countries. It was even the cause of the later division.

4. Conclusion

Born in the context of the Cold War and choosing a path leaning towards the Soviet Union and socialist countries, China demonstrated its proletarian internationalism through its support for Vietnam's resistance. However, this was not simply due to ideological factors but mainly to serve China's important domestic and foreign goals at that time. China's actions—including its support for Vietnam in the resistance war against France, its handling of the Chinese issue, and its role at the 1954 Geneva Conference—had both positive and negative effects on the people of the three Indochinese countries, particularly Vietnam. While China's intervention influenced the struggle for independence, it also contributed to later divisions, leading to severe conflicts between Vietnam and Cambodia. Therefore, strengthening solidarity among the people of the three Indochinese countries and

maintaining vigilance against external interference, especially from China, remains a valuable lesson for the region today.

Transparency:

The author confirms that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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