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Sino-Cuban relations from 1964 to 1995: conflict and reconciliation

Abstract

The aim of this chapter is to examine bilateral relations between Cuba and China since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1960 till the 80s when both two countries strengthened cooperation. The paper shows reasons for conflict between Cuba and China which started in the mid-60s emphasizing crucial moments like “rice war” and termination of party relations. It also analyzes incentives which led to the process of reconciliation and normalization of bilateral ties. The author underlines the role of Sino-Soviet relations and Sino-American rapprochement as a crucial factors which impacted relations between Beijing and Havana but also argues that China has never seen Cuba as a security threat but rather target for “moral attack” to deprecate Moscow.

Keywords: *Cuba, China, Sino-Cuban relations, foreign relations*

1. Introduction

Cuba was the first Latin American country which established diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China in 1960. Although revolutionary leaders like Mao Zedong and Fidel Castro proclaimed to take a socialist road and viewed their revolutions as part of “the world’s countryside” to encircle “the world’s city,” the honeymoon period in Sino-Cuban relations was short-lived and the ties remained sour throughout most of the remaining Cold War years. Tension erupted in the mid-1960s, leading to the termination of party ties which were not revived until 1988. In addition, no Chinese head of state had visited Cuba until the arrival

of President Jiang Zemin in 1993, followed by President Fidel Castro's reciprocal visit in 1995.

Until the present, the Sino-Cuban conflict has been a rarely-studied topic. The pioneer work by Cecil Johnson (1970) argues that the intensification of the Sino-Soviet conflict in the 1960s and Castro's tilt toward Moscow were crucial factors leading to the deterioration of Sino-Cuban relations. Another work by Maurice Halperin (1981) also shows that strained relations between China and Cuba by 1965 resulted in the end of Beijing's preferential treatment in its trade with Havana, which in turn led to the so-called "rice war" between the two countries in 1966. Recent study by Yinghong Cheng (2007), though using rarely-explored sources of information like memoirs of Chinese diplomats, also draws the same conclusion.

Scholarly works mentioned above have laid the foundation for understanding the origin of the Sino-Cuban conflict. However, what is missing from these studies is about factors leading to its prolongation from the mid-1960s until the 1980s. So far, two scholars have tried to fill this loophole. The first one is William Ratliff (1990) who states that different stances of China and Cuba on the Angolan civil war and the occupation of Cambodia by the Vietnamese forces were crucial factors for the prolongation of the conflict throughout the 1970s. The other study by Damian Fernandez (1993) holds the views China's rapprochement with Cuba's arch-enemy, the United States, in 1972 was the turning point leading to the deterioration of Sino-Cuban relations and it was not until the 1980s, with the Sino-Soviet normalization and the collapse of Soviet Eastern Europe, that both countries saw the need to improve and strengthen relations with each other. Still, reference materials used in these studies are in Western languages, mainly Spanish and English, while the newly-available ones in Chinese are still rarely explored, especially memoirs of Chinese leaders and diplomats.

Therefore, the author aims to explore the origin and the prolongation of the Sino-Cuban conflict from 1964 to the early 1980s and the road to reconciliation and strengthening of relations by the late 1980s from Chinese perspectives by using China's official publications and other relevant Chinese-language sources. Notwithstanding his agreement with previous studies in treating the Sino-Soviet conflict and the Sino-American rapprochement as crucial factors, the author argues that China never saw Cuba as a security threat in concrete terms and her conflict with Cuba was mostly polemic. However, the prolongation of the Sino-Soviet conflict and Cuba's

pro-Soviet stance throughout the 1970s rendered the Sino-Cuban reconciliation impossible. In other words, until the Soviet Union proposed to begin the negotiation for the normalization of relations in 1982, China still needed Cuba as a target for “moral attack” to defame the Soviet Union and to rally support for anti-Soviet stance among Third World countries.

2. The honeymoon period in the early 1960s

China reacted to the victory of Fidel Castro over the pro-American Batista regime in Cuba in January 1959 with joy and support, although Fidel Castro did not proclaim Marxist orientation of his revolution until the United States cut diplomatic ties with Cuba in 1961. Even in early 1962, Mao Zedong still described the Cuban revolution as “nationalist democratic” rather than socialist (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC & the Party Literature Research Center under the CC of the CPC 1998, p. 373), but China seemed content to see the emergence of the anti-American regime in the backyard of the United States. Unofficial contacts were done through the opening of Xinhua News Agency’s Havana branch in March 1959, the first branch in Latin America, and diplomatic relations were eventually established in September 1960.

The early 1960s was the honeymoon period of Sino-Cuban relations. In terms of security, China showed its support for Cuba’s stance against American imperialism. When the Kennedy administration tried to invade the Bay of Pigs to topple Castro in April 1961, China condemned it and mobilized 100,000 citizens to the Tiananmen Square to show support for Cuba (“All-out support for Cuba” 1961). The similar mass mobilization occurred again in early November 1962 after President Kennedy ordered a blockade of Cuba during the Missile Crisis. Beijing Party Secretary Peng Zhen stated that US aggression toward Cuba was also an aggression toward the Chinese people (“Defend the Cuban Revolution” 1962). Besides, both countries refused to sign the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in 1963.

Economically, China exported rice, soybean, oil, canned meat, chemical products, and machine tools to Cuba, while Cuba exported sugar, nickel, and copper to China. Bilateral trade volume rose quickly from 23.79 million USD in 1960 to 222.42 million USD in the following year (see Table 1), making China Cuba’s second largest trading partner after the Soviet Union (He 1991, p. 25). In addition, China in November 1960 agreed to give Cuba no-interest loans from 1961 to 1965 with the total

value of 246 million rubles (Cheng 1972, pp. 126–127). In 1965, Cuba was offered 22.8-million-peso credit to solve the problem of trade deficit with China (He 1991, p. 25). Also, when Cuba was greatly devastated by the hurricane in October 1963, humanitarian assistance in food and medical products was dispatched from China with the total values of 70 million yuan (Zhu 2003, p. 12), despite the fact that the latter just recovered from the three years of “Great Famine” (1960–1962).

In return, Cuba welcomed 100-plus Chinese students to study Spanish and sent Spanish-language teachers to China (Xu 2003, p. 294). More importantly, it had been one of the staunch supporters for China’s admission to the United Nations and claimed that the stationing of US Seventh Fleet on the Taiwan Straits was an interference in China’s domestic affairs. As Fidel Castro spoke of this issue clearly in his speech at the UN General Assembly in September 1960:

China represents one-fourth of the world population. What government really represents that nation? It is the government of People’s China. It maintains its government there in the midst of civil war, interfered in by the U.S. Seventh Fleet. By what right does an extracontinental power use its fleet to interfere in domestic Chinese affairs for the sole purpose of preventing the total liberation of the territory? That is illegal. So the United States does not want the case of China to be discussed here. Well, we want to set forth our view here and ask the United Nations to give a seat to the legitimate representatives of the Chinese Government. (Deutschmann & Shnookal 2007, p. 183)

Sino-Cuban cordial relations could also be seen from the frequency of mutual visits. Chairman of Cuba’s National Bank Che Guevara visited Beijing in November 1960 and told Mao Zedong that the Cuban and Latin American people must learn from the revolutionary experience of China, especially on the making of alliance between peasants and workers (“Cuban government economic mission in China” 1960). Vice-Chairman of the National People’s Congress Guo Moruo attended the celebration of the second anniversary of the Cuban revolution in Havana in January 1961. The highest-level visit took place in September 1961 when President Osvaldo Dorticos Torrado arrived in Beijing and signed a joint communiqué with President Liu Shaoqi calling for anti-imperialism and upholding world peace (“Sino-Cuban joint declaration” 1961). Also, Fidel Castro was a frequent guest for dinner at the Chinese Embassy in Havana (Huang 2007, pp. 31–32). Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai described Sino-Cuban friendship by using Chinese proverb, “things that come easily are valueless, a resolute person is hard to find” (*yiqiuwujiabao*

nandeyouxinren) (Zhu 2003, p. 13) and in October 1964 accepted an invitation to visit Havana (Yun 1996, p. 84). However, the planned visit in December was cancelled as the tension between the two countries arose by the end of the year.

3. The origin of the conflict in the mid-1960s

By the mid-1960s, the Sino-Cuban honeymoon ended because of the two factors, i.e. the radicalization of Chinese politics and the Sino-Soviet conflict. Although Mao Zedong had condemned Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's policy of "peaceful coexistence" with capitalism since the late 1950s, his domestic campaign to reemphasize the role of ideology and curb the influence of the Party's pragmatic leaders in the first half of the 1960s necessitated the use of polemics against Soviet "revisionism." In other words, class struggle inside China needed revolutionary and aggressive foreign policy (Chen 2001, pp. 11–12; Li 2012, p. 117). Therefore, China tried to bring Cuba into its side during the Sino-Cuban honeymoon period. Knowing that Fidel Castro was upset with Khrushchev's withdrawal of missiles from Cuba to avoid clashing with the United States in October 1962, China took a chance to win Castro's mind. The editorial of *People's Daily*, the Chinese Communist Party's mouthpiece newspaper, stated that the US promise not to invade Cuba in exchange for the Soviet withdrawal of missiles was an empty one, like the Munich Agreement signed with Hitler in 1938 ("We stand by Cuba" 1962; Cheng 1972, p. 152). Besides, after having been hesitant since Castro's revolution in 1959, China by late 1962 accepted that Cuba was taking a socialist road and became "comrades-in-arms" of the Chinese people ("Defend the Cuban revolution" 1962).

However, Fidel Castro did not agree with Mao Zedong's rift with the Soviet Union and called for solidarity among socialist countries to fight against "Yankee imperialism" (Castro 1963). Notwithstanding the fact that both Castro and Mao held similar views on several aspects of the revolution (e.g. their beliefs in "subjective condition" as a key to the success of the revolution, and in the role of mass mobilization as a mean to solve economic difficulties), and that Castro had promised Chinese diplomat Zeng Tao in 1961 to choose Beijing as his first destination abroad (Zeng 1997, p. 46), Castro whose heart, according to K. S. Karol (1969 cited in Cheng 2007, p. 100), was with China but his stomach was with the Soviet Union, decided to visit Moscow in April 1963.

The turning point in Sino-Cuban relations took place when Nikita Khrushchev fell from power on October 15, 1964. Fidel Castro hoped that leadership change in the Kremlin would be an opportunity for ending China's polemic against the Soviet Union. He therefore made a visit to the Chinese Embassy in Havana on October 18 to express such hope (Yun 1996, p. 87), but it did not bear fruit as China's relations with the Soviet Union remained tense. The new Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev told Zhou Enlai during the latter's visit to Moscow in early November that he would continue Khrushchev's policy of peaceful co-existence. Therefore, China still condemned the Soviet leadership of practicing "Khrushchevism without Khrushchev" ("Why Khrushchov fell" 1964). However, Castro tried again in December by sending Chairman of Agricultural Reform Institute Carlos Rafael Rodriquez to meet Mao Zedong who angrily told Rodriquez that the battle against Soviet revisionism could not be stopped and would possibly last ten thousand years (Wang 2013, p. 85). Another visit by Che Guevara in January 1965 did not yield results as well. After that, Castro began to criticize China more fiercely. In his speech to the students at the University of Havana on March 13, Castro said that China's polemics against the Soviet Union destroyed solidarity among socialist countries and was not a "wise strategy" in face of the enemy (Kenner & Petras 1970, p. 121).

Entering the year 1965, Chinese politics became more radical and ultra-leftist, creating negative impacts on foreign relations. The article "Long live the victory of people's war" by Vice-Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party Lin Biao published on September 3 stated that Mao Zedong Thought was a common asset of the revolutionary people of the whole world (Lin 1965). In other words, China by the mid-1960s proclaimed itself to be the mentor of the world revolution. Therefore, Chinese propaganda materials were sent to all leftist revolutionary movements including those in Latin America, which in turn inevitably challenged Fidel Castro's presumed leadership of the revolution in his continent. Losing his patience toward China, Castro on September 14 called Chinese Charge d'affaires to Cuba Huang Wenyou to his office, put Chinese propaganda materials on the table and said China was throwing "improper seeds" on the Cuban soil. He even stated that China's propaganda activities in Cuba were worse than the sabotage against Cuba by US imperialism (Yun 1996, pp. 89–90). Knowing the news during his stay in Beijing, Chinese Ambassador to Cuba Wang Youping wrote an urgent report to Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and Foreign Minister Chen Yi. The advice he received from all the

three leaders was summarized as, “when the wolf become the hegemon, be friendly to the fox; do your best despite glimmering hope; do not pay attention unless it is beyond endurance; solve the problem cautiously when it arises” (ibid., p. 90). Thus, China had stayed calm until another problem arose at the beginning of 1966.

4. China’s rice war with Cuba and the termination of party relations in 1966

Rice has been vital to the Cuban people’s livelihood since the colonial era, and by the late 1940s, 90% of it was imported from the United States. Shortly after Castro’s revolution in 1959, the United States imposed embargo on Cuba, followed by the Organization of American States (OAS) in 1964. Meanwhile, as the world market price of rice had increased in the early 1960s, rice in Cuba became a rationed commodity with the limit of 5 pounds per head per month (Halperin 1981, pp. 197–198). As the Soviet Union could only supply Cuba with wheat, China became the major rice supplier of Cuba in exchange for the latter’s exportation of sugar. However, by early 1966, trade dispute between China and Cuba called “rice war” arose and greatly aggravated the strained relations between the two countries.

On January 2, 1966, on the eve of the opening of the Afro-Asian-Latin American People’s Solidarity Conference (informally called the Tricontinental Congress) in which almost 600 representatives of nationalist and socialist movements from 82 countries came to attend in Havana, Fidel Castro disclosed that, according to the report from his officials in the Ministry of Foreign Trade, China in 1966 would decrease its rice exportation to Cuba from 250,000 tons in 1965 to almost half of it, and would not imported as much as 800,000 tons of sugar proposed by the Cuban side (Johnson 1970, p. 165; Cheng 1972, p. 213). Castro’s revelation led to the reaction from *People’s Daily* on January 10 which stated that 250,000 tons of China’s rice exported to Cuba in 1965 was considered on year-by-year basis without any commitment to keep the same figure forever, and that its rising domestic demands of rice necessitated an export reduction to 135,000 tons in 1966, which was still equivalent to the figure in 1964 (“Facts on Sino-Cuban trade” 1966). Shortly afterward, *Granma*, the Cuban Communist Party’s mouthpiece newspaper, on January 12 published the statement from Cuba’s Ministry of Foreign Trade, saying

that the Chinese figure was inaccurate and in fact 135,000 tons of rice were be the lowest figure since 1961, and that China's export reduction would aggravate the situation of rice ration in Cuba ("Quarterly chronicle and documentation" 1966; "Further remarks on the Sino-Cuban trade question" 1966).

Until now, there has been no evidence to prove if the reduction of rice exportation was a result of China's rising domestic demands as the Chinese claimed, or it was a result of China's dissatisfaction with Cuba's tilt toward Moscow in the Sino-Soviet conflict as argued by Johnson (1970) and Halperin (1981). But what is clear is that China lost its patience toward Cuba after Castro's revelation of the dispute to the public in early 1966. The Xinhua News Agency on January 9 stated that Castro was a liar and an obstacle in Sino-Cuban relations (Cheng 1972, p. 214). On the next day, *People's Daily* questioned the hidden agenda behind Castro's revelation despite that fact that the trade negotiation was still going on ("Facts on Sino-Cuban trade" 1966). It seemed that, in Chinese views, Castro's disclosure of the dispute on the eve of the Tricontinental Conference was part of the Soviet plan to discredit China in international arena. As a result, China in that month decided to terminate party relations with Cuba.

Shortly afterward, Fidel Castro made another speech on February 6 which disclosed another problem in relations with China, i.e. the infiltration of Chinese propaganda in Cuba. Castro stated that, in the meeting with Huang Wenyou in September 1965, he had asked the Chinese to end it, but from then until early January of the following year, 58,041 issues of China's propaganda materials still flew to Cuba (Castro 1966). His speech led to another reaction on February 22 by *People's Daily* which asked why the Soviet Union was allowed to distribute anti-China materials in Cuba whereas China was not ("Renmin Ribao editor's note on Prime Minister Castro's anti-China statement" 1966). Another speech by Castro at the University of Havana on March 13 branded Mao Zedong as "a senile idiot" and criticized Mao's personality cult by suggesting that he read Friedrich Engels's *The Dialectics of Nature* to realize the eventual eclipse of the sun (Cheng 2007, p. 112). A week later, on March 20, Mao told the Politburo that "traitors and scabs have always opposed China. Our banners must be new and fresh in color, they must not be bedraggled. Castro is nothing more than a bad man in an important position" (Mao 1966).

The Sino-Cuban conflict further aggravated throughout the latter half of the 1960s. During the Cultural Revolution, Vice President of the

Cuban Academy of Sciences told a Soviet diplomat in Havana after visiting Beijing in October 1966 that “it is hard to imagine, to what type of idiocy the ranks of the Red Guards and the people led by them reach. The Hitlerites could have learned something from them” (Friedman 2015, p. 154), while Yao Wenyuan, member of the “Gang of Four” and one of the rising stars during the Cultural Revolution, called Fidel Castro a revisionist (Kulik 2000 cited in Friedman 2015, p. 154). When the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia in August 1968, it was condemned by Zhou Enlai as a demonstration of Soviet chauvinism, social-imperialism, and social-fascism (Chou 1968). In contrast, Castro hailed the Soviet intervention as a method to control the “counterrevolutionary situation” instigated by capitalism and imperialism (Castro 1968).

5. The prolonged conflict throughout the 1970s

For a short period from 1969 to 1971, Sino-Cuban ties slightly improved because of the three factors. Firstly, by 1968, the Cultural Revolution was deradicalized and China began to repair its damaged foreign relations. On the May Day of 1970, Mao Zedong told acting Cuban Ambassador to Beijing on the Tiananmen rostrum, “we want Cuba, not the Yankees” (Wang 2013, p. 100). In July 1970, the Chinese delegation attended the celebration of the National Rebellion Day (i.e. the day commemorating Fidel Castro’s first uprising against the Batista regime) in Havana, the first one to Cuba since 1965. The celebration of the 10th anniversary its diplomatic relations with China was also held in Havana in September 1970 and Cuba dispatched the delegation led by President of the Cuba-China Friendship Association Baldomero Alvarez to visit Beijing in the following month (“Cuban Delegation in China” 1970; Wang 1973, p. 25). In December 1970, after being recalled to participate in the Cultural Revolution in 1967, the Chinese Ambassador was sent back to Havana. During his visit to the Cuban Embassy in Beijing to celebrate the Cuban Revolution Day on January 2, 1971, Zhou Enlai expressed his hope that Sino-Cuban relations would enter a new era (Wang 2013, p. 100).

Secondly, the two countries shared the same stance on international issues in 1970. When General Lon Nol was successful in staging a coup with the US support against Cambodian Head of State Norodom Sihanouk in March, both China and Cuba condemned the incident and recognized Sihanouk’s government-in-exile in Beijing. In October, when

Marxist politician Salvador Allende won presidential election in Chile. China congratulated Allende's victory, showed its support for his policy of eradicating US economic influence in Chile (Wang 1973, pp. 26–27), and established diplomatic relations with Santiago in December. Cuban-Chilean diplomatic ties were also established in the following year.

Thirdly, after two decades of attempts, China finally entered the United Nations in October 1971. In his speech to the General Assembly in November of that year, Chinese Representative Qiao Guanhua thanked Cuba for its support ("Speech by Chiao Kuan-hua" 1971). In the same month, Fidel Castro said in an interview with Mexican journalists that China's entry to the UN would strengthen political and economic ties between China and Latin American countries, which in turn undermined the influence of the United States (Castro 1971).

However, tensions between China and Cuba came to light again after China's decision to make a political rapprochement with the United States and welcome President Richard Nixon's visit to Beijing in February 1972. Zhou Enlai's report to the Tenth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in September of the following year stated that Sino-American rapprochement was a necessary compromise against Soviet revisionism (Chou 1973). As a result, China toned down its criticism of US foreign policy, whereas Cuba still perceived the United States as its greatest threat. Difference between the two countries became obvious when Chilean President Allende was toppled with US support by General Augusto Pinochet and committed suicide in September 1973. Although Chinese authorities stated that the coup was instigated by "reactionary forces" inside and outside Chile and hailed Allende as a Marxist martyr ("Premier Chou sends condolences" 1973; "Military coup" 1973). China did not cut diplomatic relations with Pinochet's government, in contrast with Cuba and most of the socialist countries. This led to Fidel Castro's criticism of China in his speech in Havana to commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of the Cuban victory at the Bay of Pigs on April 19, 1976 that said:

At times imperialism holds back the course of liberation in certain countries such as Chile.(...) Shamelessly furthering this strategy are those who from the rank of revolutionary movement itself betray the principle of proletariat internationalism through vanity, ideological inconsistency, personal ambitions, or simple decadence and senility, as in the case of the arrogant, demented clique that governs the destiny of China. (Castro 1981a, p. 108)

Meanwhile, Cuba strengthened its ties with the Soviet Union by becoming a member of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COM-ECON) in 1972, condemning those who labeled the Soviet Union as imperialism in the Non-Aligned Summit in Algeria in 1973, and joining the Interkit, the forum between the Soviet Union and its allies in formulating China policy in 1975. In addition, with its moral commitment to liberate the Third World from imperialist powers, Cuba throughout the 1970s and 1980s had given military assistance to several revolutionary movements in Africa, making it second only to the United States in terms of the number of troops operating abroad during the Cold War (Gleijeses 2010, p. 327). Cuban behavior was thus interpreted by China in the 1970s as part of Soviet expansionism.

Two major issues became sources of polemics between China and Cuba in the 1970s. The first one was the civil war in Angola which, on the eve and in the wake of its independence for Portugal in 1975, was fought between three armed movements, i.e. the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). By the mid-1970s, the first was supported by weapons and military technicians from the Soviet Union, whereas the others received the same support from China and the United States. However, China abruptly withdrew itself from the civil war in October 1975 after apartheid South Africa joined the Chinese and American side by sending armed forces and weapons to help FLNA and UNITA against MPLA, causing an embarrassment for China whose anti-apartheid stance had so far gained prestige among African countries. In contrast, alarmed by the South African intervention, Cuba decided to send troops to help MPLA. By the end of its mission in 1991, there were totally 375,000 Cuban troops operating in Angola (Choy, Chui & Wong 2005, p. 79).

Notwithstanding the Chinese withdrawal and the Soviet/Cuban-backed MPLA's victory in establishing the People's Republic of Angola in November 1975, the civil war in Angola was still used by both China and Cuba to attack each other. In an interview with French journalists in May 1977, Fidel Castro said China was betraying Marxist internationalism by joining with the CIA, the neo-colonialists, and the racists in the civil war in Angola (Castro 1977), while China raised the issue of Cuba's intervention in Angola to discredit Castro's presumed leadership in the Non-Aligned Movement as the Soviet "trojan horse." An article in *Peking Review* in June 1978 asked a question, if Cuba's real intention for the

intervention in Angola was to liberate the people there from the imperialists, why hadn't Cuba intervened since the years of Portuguese rule? ("Is Cuba a non-aligned country" 1978).

The second major issue in Sino-Cuban polemics arose when Vietnam signed an alliance treaty with the Soviet Union in November 1978, invaded Pol Pot's Cambodia on the Christmas Day of the same year, and installing the pro-Vietnamese regime in Phnom Penh led by Heng Samrin in January 1979. China reacted by, in Deng Xiaoping's words, "giving Vietnam a lesson" with 170,000 troops invading Vietnam's northern provinces on February 17, 1979. Four days later, Fidel Castro held a mass rally to support Vietnam in Havana, saying that China under fascist rule betrayed socialism and joined hand with the US imperialists in invading Vietnam. He called Deng Xiaoping "a numbskull" and the caricature of Adolf Hitler (Castro 1981c, pp. 167-179). Castro attacked China again in his speech at the Non-Alignment Summit in Havana on September 3 of the same year (Castro 1981b, p. 209). Therefore, China reacted to Castro's speech through the editorial of *People's Daily* on September 14, 1979, saying that the Soviet Union was behind the scene, as follows:

The Havana summit had the positive aspect of making many non-aligned countries see more clearly the true colours of the "non-aligned" Cuba and Vietnam and realize their own strength of unity in struggle. One can predict that Cuba and Vietnam, instigated by the Soviet Union, will place all sorts of obstacles along the path of the non-aligned movement. In particular, the Cuban authorities will abuse their power as "the current chairman" to push the Soviet conspiracy to sabotage the fundamental principles and orientation of the movement. (Peng 1979, p. 24)

It should be noted that, unlike India and Vietnam which in the 1970s became Soviet allies and had territorial conflicts with China, the Sino-Cuban conflict was mostly polemic. Although Cuba's military combats abroad were condemned by China, they were limited to Latin America and Africa, far away from China's concrete security interests. As a result, it would have been easier for the two countries to reconcile with each other, like the Sino-Yugoslav rapprochement in the late 1970s. But why didn't the Sino-Cuban one occur in the same decade? The possible answer is that China throughout the 1970s adhered to Mao Zedong's Three Worlds Theory, calling for the united front against "Soviet social-imperialism" ("Chairman Mao's theory of differentiation" 1977). Therefore, as long as China and the Soviet Union remained enemies, China was still able to utilize its polemics with Cuba to rally support from Third World countries

against the Soviet Union. As Chih-yu Shih (1993, p. 186) argues on the role of morality in Chinese foreign policy that:

China does not see the Third world in economic terms, so economically undeveloped countries willing to serve hegemonic states are unacceptable allies. Many of these perceived Third world defectors are involved in efforts to organize the Third World: good examples include Cuba, India, and Vietnam. China would refuse to deal with them because to do so would hurt the credibility of the united front against hegemonism.

By the beginning of the 1980s, as the Sino-Soviet relations further deteriorated after the latter's invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, there was no prospect for the improvement of relations between China and Cuba. In the emergency meeting of the UN General Assembly on January 14, 1980, China with 103 countries supported the resolution calling for the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, whereas Cuba objected to it ("Aligned chairman of non-alignment" 1980). The resolution of the Second Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba in December of the same year stated that Cuba was glad to see the Afghan people being liberated from despotic and semi-feudal rule ("Resolution on international policy" 1981). As late as February 1982, China still condemned Cuba as a tool of the Soviet Union (Lan 1982).

6. The Sino-Cuban reconciliation after 1982

There were at least three factors leading to the reconciliation between China and Cuba by 1982. The first one was Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev's overtures to China in his speech in March 1982, which led to three rounds of negotiations by the end of the following year. Although the two countries had not reached the breakthrough until 1988, the atmosphere of the relations between China and the Soviet Union by late 1982 began to relax. It can be seen in Chinese Communist Party Secretary General Hu Yaobang's report to the Twelfth Congress in September 1982 stating that the major threat of world peace came from the competition between the superpowers (Hu 1982), in contrast with Party Chairman Hua Guofeng's report to the Eleventh Party Congress in August 1977 emphasizing the Soviet Union as major threat (Hua 1977). In addition, the labeling of the Soviet Union as "revisionism" and "social-imperialism" in the Chinese constitutions of 1975 and 1978 disappeared from the new constitution promulgated in December 1982. Besides, by 1983, Mao Zedong's

Three Worlds Theory calling for the anti-Soviet united front was no longer mentioned by Chinese authorities. Therefore, as Lowell Dittmer (1992, p. 132) argues, it was no longer necessary for China to use anti-hegemonism as a precondition for the improvement of relations with the Third World socialist countries.

The second factor was a result of Deng Xiaoping's institution of reform and opening-up policy since 1978. After having collaborated with the United States against the Soviet Union in the late 1970s, China in 1982 declared "an independent foreign policy," which emphasized the expansion of foreign economic relations (Jian 1996, p. 219). Hu Yaobang's report stated that China supported economic cooperation among developing countries which would lead to "the new international economic order" (Hu 1982). As He Li argues, given China's intention to expand economic ties with the South, the improvement of relations with an influential figure of the Non-Aligned Movement like Fidel Castro seemed to be necessary (He 1991, p. 64).

Another factor came from Cuba which began to face an economic crisis by the early 1980s because of rising import oil price and falling export sugar price. Cuba's trade deficit with the Soviet Union and the COMECON countries thus increased from 196 million pesos in 1979 to 833 million pesos and 1,023 million pesos in 1980 and 1981 respectively (Dominguez 1989, pp. 94–95). The Soviet Union's giving of low-interest loans to Cuba, though solving the deficit, increased the latter's debt burden in the long term. Cuba therefore had to expand its economic ties with countries outside the Soviet camp, including a big economy like China whose trade with Cuba in 1980 constituted only 2.6% of the latter's total foreign trade (Mesa-Lago 1993, p. 139).

The Sino-Cuban reconciliation began when Cuban Vice Minister of Foreign Trade Ricardo Cabrisas visited Beijing on October 19, 1983, the first ministerial level visit in 18 years since Che Guevara's visit in 1965. It should be noted that his visit was the same time as Soviet Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Leonid Illychev's visit to negotiate the normalization of relations with China. Later, in July 1984, Chinese Assistant to Minister of Foreign Affairs Zhu Qizhen visited Cuba to inspect the work of Chinese embassy and exchange views with Cuban authorities (Wren 1984), followed by Cuban Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Pelegrin Torras's visit to China in May 1985. Finally, during the Twenty-Sixth Congress of the French Communist Party in December 1987, the Cuban representative met Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party Secretariat Yan Mingfu and proposed for the reestablishment of party relations (Wang 2013, p. 137).

However, China did not promptly agree with Cuba. According to Li Beihai, then-Vice Minister of the Chinese Communist Party International Liaison Department, it was not until early August 1988 that he was sent to Havana to negotiate for the reestablishment of party ties (Li 2010). Although he did not disclose the reason for a seven-month delay, it is highly possible that China waited for substantive progress on its normalization talks with the Soviet Union. By the end of 1987, Cambodia was still a thorny issue between the two countries and Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson on January 12, 1988 stated that Deng Xiaoping would meet Gorbachev only after Vietnam's withdrawal from Cambodia (Home News Library of the Xinhua News Agency 1989, p. 479). Therefore, after the Vietnamese declaration in July 1988 to withdraw all troops from Cambodia by early 1990, Li Beihai's visit to Havana took place in August and was reciprocated by the visit to Beijing by the delegation of the Cuban Communist Party International Department in the following month, symbolizing the reestablishment of party relations. Later, Cuban Minister of Foreign Affairs Isidoro Malmierca visited China in January 1989, followed by Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen's reciprocal visit to Cuba in June of the same year. In the book commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the International Liaison Department published in 1992, Yang Baibing, then-Deputy Director-General of Latin American Affairs wrote that China's branding of Fidel Castro as a revisionist and a Soviet puppet was incorrect (Yang 1992, pp. 183–184).

7. The strengthened Sino-Cuban relations at the end of the 1980s

Shortly after the restoration of party ties, both countries faced crises which resulted in the strengthening of bilateral political relations. In China, the demonstration of students calling for the Party's accountability ended with the military crackdown at the Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989, leading to the condemnation of China by Western countries. Meanwhile, socialist regimes in Eastern Europe were collapsing one after another after facing mass protests. Therefore, Deng Xiaoping in his talks with former Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere on November 23, 1989 saw the chaos in China and Eastern Europe as part of the US policy of "peaceful evolution," i.e. to destroy socialism without doing a war (Deng 1994, pp. 333–334).

For Cuba, political changes in Eastern Europe in 1989 and the Soviet collapse in 1991 created disastrous impacts on its security and economy. The administration of US President George Bush held the views that, in the light of political changes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the days of Fidel Castro regime were numbered and thus there was no need to negotiate with Cuba. In an interview in February 1990, US Secretary of State James Baker refused to give a guarantee that his country would not to invade Cuba, and in the middle of that year, an official from the Pentagon urged the US government to plan for “humanitarian intervention” if unrest arose in Cuba. Later, the Cuban Democracy Act was passed in 1992, increasing more restrictions for US companies on their trade with Cuba until the latter’s showing of substantial progress on democratization and implementation of free market economy (Gunn 1993, pp. 18–21).

Therefore, by the end of the 1980s, China and Cuba became supporter of each other in defending socialism and upholding the principle of non-interference in foreign countries’ internal affairs. Fidel Castro told Qian Qichen during the latter’s visit to Havana on June 8, 1989, or four days after the Tiananmen incident, that Cuba supported the crackdown to uphold China’s unity, and that China under anarchy would be the tragedy of the world (Qian 2003, p. 169). In reciprocity, Chinese President Jiang Zemin made a visit to Havana in November 1993, his first destination abroad after assuming state presidency and the first visit by China’s head of state. He was warmly welcomed by Castro who ordered tens of thousands of people to stand along both sides of the road from the airport to the hotel, despite that fact that this practice was abolished as part of austerity measures by the end of the 1980s. In addition, the Cuban leader awarded Jiang Zemin the Order of José Martí and extended his regards to Deng Xiaoping (Xu 2014, pp. 86–88, 95–96).

During his talks with Fidel Castro, Jiang Zemin expressed his confidence on the bright prospect of socialism by giving four reasons. Firstly, there were still countries upholding socialism, especially a country with one-fifth of the world’s population like China. Secondly, China would not meet the same fate as the Soviet Union because it did not allocate its resources to compete militarily with the United States throughout the Cold War. Thirdly, from the experience of generations of Chinese people, only socialism could save China. Fourthly, as socialism was born several centuries after capitalism and was on the process of development, one should not consider its setbacks as an evidence for the failure of socialism. He also criticized the US interventionism by saying that democracy, freedom,

and human rights were relative, not absolute (Jiang 2006, pp. 336–338). After listening to Jiang Zemin, Castro said that the survival of Chinese socialism was the utmost inspiration for Cuba (Xu 2014, p. 90).

Fidel Castro paid a reciprocal visit to China on November 29, 1995. Jiang Zemin thanked Cuba for supporting China on the issues of Taiwan, Tibet, and human rights, and, in return, expressed China's support for the government and the people of Cuba to maintain their sovereignty against foreign intervention (Chen 2009, p. 298). Meanwhile, in an interview with Chinese journalists, Castro cherished the contribution of the Cuban Chinese who fought alongside the local people for Cuban independence, praised the Chinese people for their century-long struggle against foreign powers, and expressed his confidence that China would be a rising economic power in the twenty-first century ("Further reportage on Castro's visit to China" 1995).

The symbolic act to end the decades-long rift with China by Fidel Castro during his stay in Beijing was the visit, upon his request, to Mao Zedong's mausoleum (Xu 2014, pp. 243–244) to pay respect to the man he once condemned as head of "the arrogant, demented clique that governs the destiny of China." Unfortunately, he had no chance to meet Deng Xiaoping because Deng's health had greatly deteriorated since 1993. When Deng Xiaoping passed away in February 1997, he was hailed by Fidel Castro as a leader with great contribution to the construction of Chinese socialism (Ratliff & Fontaine 2000, p. 54).

8. Conclusions

Tensions between China and Cuba lasting from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s were the result of the Sino-Soviet conflict. Fidel Castro's tilt toward Moscow by 1965 led to the termination of party ties with Beijing in the following year. Entering the 1970s, China's rapprochement with Cuba's arch-enemy, the United States, aggravated the tense relations. However, it should be noted that although Cuba's military involvement in Angola and its support for Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia were perceived by China as part of the Soviet Union's expansionist plan, China did not see Cuba as a security threat in concrete terms but only used it as a target for moral attack. In other words, as the author argues, China until the early 1980s still needed to attack Cuba to rally support for anti-Soviet stance among Third World countries. The situation improved after

the beginning of Sino-Soviet normalization process in 1982, paving a way for the restoration of party relations between China and Cuba in 1988. Finally, the collapse of the socialism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union from 1989 to 1991 resulted in the strengthened political ties between the two countries in defense of socialism and the principle of non-interference.

Figure 1. Sino-Cuban Trade Volume from 1960 to 1980 (Unit: Million USD)

Year	China's Export to Cuba	China's Import from Cuba	Total
1960	9.74	14.05	23.79
1961	107.54	114.87	222.41
1962	80.43	106.71	187.14
1963	89.24	79.86	169.10
1964	106.71	89.56	196.27
1965	111.74	104.27	216.01
1966	87.48	81.52	169.00
1967	77.05	59.92	136.97
1968	60.58	69.66	130.24
1969	68.49	51.88	120.37
1970	70.88	69.85	140.37
1971	65.24	65.51	130.75
1972	72.38	53.36	125.74
1973	95.27	83.44	178.71
1974	106.66	111.67	218.33
1975	84.84	110.55	195.39
1976	48.76	87.27	136.03
1977	54.11	58.89	113.00
1978	59.27	93.79	153.06
1979	93.58	117.75	211.33
1980	92.83	127.29	220.12

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China (1982, p. 365).

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