# Bellicose peace – China’s peace signature campaign and discourses about “peace” in the early 1950s

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*This paper is forthcoming with Modern China http://journals.sagepub.com/home/mcx*

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# Bellicose peace – China’s peace signature campaign and discourses about “peace” in the early 1950s

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# Abstract

In the early 1950s, China engaged in several military actions, most notably in the Korean War. Nevertheless, the World Peace Council, a SU-sponsored international organization, praised the country as a “fortress for the protection of world peace” in 1954. This hinged upon a very specific, bellicose understanding of “peacefulness”, which did not mean the rejection of war, but war against the “right” enemy.

I discuss this understanding, its function within the international community, its embeddedness in international political thinking and its promulgation among the Chinese population, using the example of a campaign in 1950 to collect signatures on a World Peace Council-authored appeal against the atomic bomb.

Self-promotion as a peaceful nation in the bellicose sense served a variety of purposes for the young PRC, most importantly the goal to instil bloc thinking in the PRC’s population and to gain prestige within the new international order of the Cold War.

**Keywords**

Aggressive war, “just war” theory, World Peace Council, Korean War, mass campaigns

# Introduction

In 1954, the World Peace Council, an international organization sponsored by the Soviet Union, praised China as a “fortress for the protection of world peace” 保卫世界和平的堡垒 (Li Y., 1954: 36). At that time, China looked back on rather warlike years, which included, among other things, four years of participation in the Korean War (1950-1953). However, it was not in spite of, but because of actions like the Korean War that China received this compliment. This paper explores the seeming paradox using the example of one of the PRC’s first mass campaigns: the “peace signature campaign” 和平签名运动 from May to November 1950, which sought to gather as many signatures as possible on the Stockholm Appeal. This Appeal was a document created by the World Peace Council and calling for the ban of nuclear weapons. Signatures on it were collected in all countries in which the Council had branches.

That the PRC could be called a “fortress for the protection of world peace” at this point in time hinged upon a definition of “peacefulness” that was nonpacifist, but was – and in fact is – internationally shared under the headline of “collective security”. Within this discourse, peacefulness and even peace itself did not mean the absence of war, but rather a fight against the “right” enemy. In other words, it was bellicose. On the international stage, from the World Peace Council to the United Nations, this “right enemy” was often defined as those engaging in “aggressive war”, a notion that had in this form been coined during World War I, and then been enshrined in institutions like the League of Nations and later on in the Charter of the United Nations. In the Eastern Bloc and with it in the PRC, this “aggressor” was in the early 1950s identified as the Western camp, which was further labelled “imperialist” and “war-mongering”. This made the Korean War a “peaceful” war. The bellicosity of peacefulness was not unique to China, but part and parcel of the post-WWII of international relations for virtually every nation. It was therefore a logic that spanned international (the Eastern Bloc) and national (the PRC) rhetoric, and in the Korean War the West argued for its side of the conflict in the exact same way, just with the “aggressor” being defined differently.

By participating in the peace signature campaign of 1950, the PRC successfully carved out a reputation for peacefulness within the World Peace Council community, which it could then use for further, not necessarily pacifist, agendas, such as shaping narratives about the Korean War. The campaign also sought to spread this international-level notion of a bellicose peacefulness to the Chinese population all the way to the villages, in this way educating the “masses” in the ways of Cold War bloc thinking. But while people at the grassroots appear to have signed the Stockholm Appeal with some enthusiasm, they rejected both the notion of bellicose peacefulness and the bloc building that came with it, in favor of a more intuitive peace (absence of war) and a PRC that was dependent on none of the former imperialist powers, including the Soviet Union. In other words, while the Chinese state at the national level conducted a campaign that was sponsored by an international Eastern Bloc organization, its meaning was transformed and even turned into its very opposite at the grassroots.

The peace signature campaign of 1950 has received scant attention in scholarship. Among the very few works on it are articles by Cheng Kai, who touches upon aspects of bloc building in the context of the campaign; by Henrietta Harrison, who discusses it as part of “popular responses to the atomic bomb”; and Chen Wensheng, who sketches the peace signature campaign in Beijing, reading it as an expression of China’s strong peace wish (Cheng, 2013; Harrison, 2013: 98; W. Chen, 2012: 91).

While the signature campaign on the Stockholm Appeal of 1950 was short-lived, the claim to peacefulness is still important in the PRC today. In line with this, there have been some more discussions on China’s relationship to peace, albeit often made implicitly or in passing. These discussions tend to imply either an intuitive understanding of peace as the absence of war and of peacefulness as the rejection of war, or they point to the somewhat counterintuitive conceptualization of peace in the PRC and in the Communist World Peace Movement, but see it isolated from broader traditions in political thinking. Among the latter, for example, is Anne-Marie Brady, who argues that the early PRC defined “peace” in terms of very specific political goals: as “an acceptance by the West of the Chinese revolution, an acknowledgment that the Chinese Communist Party [was] the legitimate government of China, and an end to Western aggression against China” (Brady, 2003: 89). Among the former is scholarship on the wider question of whether China is and has in history been a “peaceful” nation. Often acts or glorifications of war are then seen as counterevidence to China’s peacefulness and, vice versa, professions of peacefulness as an indicator that China will not engage in war in the future. Such literature comprises works on the Qing expansion (Perdue, 2005), the Qing glorification of war (Waley-Cohen, 2006), and changing attitudes towards the military in different time periods (Waldron, 1991; McCord, 1996; van de Ven, 1996: 737; Lorge, 2013: 2). It includes the debates on whether Confucianism was a pacifist force in Chinese culture (Fairbank, 1974: 7) or rather a source for pacifist rhetoric more than a reality (Fried, 1952; van de Ven, 1996: 737; Di Cosmo, 2009: 2). It also comprises literature on China’s contemporary international relations that has directed its gaze to China’s potential future behavior, looking, for example, into the credibility of political slogans such as the “peaceful coexistence” and the “peaceful rise” (Chen Y., 2005; B. Zhang, 2015; Teufel Dreyer, 2008; Odgaard, 2012; Wang, 2011).

Beyond these intuitive and isolated approaches, however, locating the early PRC peace rhetoric within concepts that were internationally shared (across the blocs) and are even still treated as valid ideas nowadays, opens up the possibility to see the functions of the peace rhetoric, outside of its implications for China’s attitude towards war: It points to the rhetoric’s role in bloc building in the early Cold War period, and the way superpower-initiated ideas were taken up and transformed differently at national and local levels. This is a picture that emerges from materials published in the PRC, such as propaganda books, booklets, newspapers and cartoons, Central Committee directives as well as archival materials (letters, propaganda materials, reports) on the World Peace Council taken from the GDR section of the Bundesarchiv (national archives) in Berlin and on the local implementation of the Stockholm signature campaign as it emerges from documents of the Shanghai Municipal Archives. The methodology chosen for this paper combines intellectual with social history.

More importantly, all of this shows that the early PRC used these concepts of peace to carve out a position for itself in the new international order of the Cold War. After the Sino-Soviet split and even today with theorizations about the tributary system, the PRC sought and seeks to use peace rhetoric to create a Chinese alternative to the existing international order (On the Maoist “third way”: Cook, 2010: 288; for theorizations on the tributary systems, see Zhao, 2011; Kang, 2007). However, this was not the case in 1950. The international order and the peace concepts the PRC deployed to position itself within it were defined by others. They were shaped by a tradition in political thinking that went back to the First World War, thus predating the Cold War era and also decolonization, which was then in progress. This accounts for the paradox that a rhetoric that hinged upon enmity towards “imperialists” and “aggressors” not only originated, among others, with those who had held empires in the 19th and early 20th centuries, but was also shared by those whom the PRC labelled “imperialist aggressors” in 1950.

Chinese reports about the peace signature campaign conceived of the institutions involved in the campaign as spanning the international, national and local level. At the international level was the World Peace Council, an organization that went back to a Polish endeavor in 1948 to breathe new life into the world peace movement of the 1930s, but which was soon sponsored by the Soviet Union (Schlaga, 1991: 33–41, 48). The Council consisted of various central bodies, such as the presidium and the secretariat, which in the early 1950s was located in Paris. At the time of the peace signature campaign, its president was M.F. Joliot-Curie; its secretary-general J. Laffitte; and the writer Guo Moruo 郭沫若 acted as one of several vice-presidents (Laffitte, 1950e). Contrary to the United Nations, the World Peace Council did not control any mechanisms that would have given it any formal political power. Instead, its most visible activities included convening international congresses (for instance, the one in Stockholm in March 1950, where the Appeal was formulated) and conducting international propaganda for its causes, for example through campaigns, international peace prizes and publications like the journal *Défense de la Paix*, which was translated into different languages (Yang L., 2013: 135). Technically, the World Peace Council aspired to include members from across the Cold War camps (Schlaga, 1991: 48). However, members from the Western Bloc were usually individuals with Communist leanings, who were sometimes persecuted by their respective governments for their involvement in the (SU-sponsored) World Peace Council (Wittner, 1993: 301).

At the national levels, the World Peace Council’s activities were implemented by the countries’ peace committees. The PRC, for example, had founded its national branch of the Council, the Chinese Committee of the Council for the Protection of World Peace 中国保卫世界和平大会委员会, short “Chinese Peace Committee” and in Chinese “*Heda*”) in October 1949 (Yang L., 2013: 135). Its head was Guo Moruo. The activities of this Chinese Peace Committee were closely controlled by the foreign ministry. For example, premier and foreign minister Zhou Enlai 周恩来 gave instructions to delegates travelling to World Peace Council congresses on how to breach which topics in which way with other delegates (Zhou, 1951), and Chinese Peace Committee activities were officially endorsed by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCCCP, 2013a). At the local level existed branches of the Committee, but mostly, the Chinese Peace Committee drew upon the help of other types of local organizations, such as women’s associations, various *danwei* or district governments.

# The peace signature campaign

On 29 April 1950, the *People’s Daily* printed an “announcement of the Committee of the Chinese Council for the Protection of World Peace”. Addressing “the peace-loving compatriots of the whole country”, it stated that “the Standing Committee of the World Peace Council calls upon the peace-loving people of the whole world to sign an appeal demanding the ban of atomic war.” (Renmin ribao, 1950a) This was the beginning of one of the newly born PRC’s first mass campaigns. Its goal was to collect as many signatures as possible on an appeal that read (translated from the Chinese version of 29 April 1950): “We demand: To unconditionally prohibit using atomic weapons as tools for mass destructions [lit. “tools to destroy people on a large scale”], and to establish strict international controls, so as to guarantee the implementation of this decision. We think that: Any government that first uses nuclear weapons on any other country is a war criminal. We call upon the people of the whole world to sign this appeal.” (Renmin ribao, 1950a)

At the time, the young PRC’s position was still quite precarious. While it had been officially founded a few months before, the civil war was far from over, with resistance being especially strong in the southwest of China (Brown, 2007), and the CCP leadership making plans to “liberate” Taiwan very soon (J. Chen, 2001: 165). Internationally, Mao Zedong 毛泽东 had announced that the PRC was “leaning to one side” in the newly emerging international order of the Cold War, namely to that of the SU. This came with a range of opportunities, problems and responsibilities, from an expectation that the PRC would aid Kim Il-sung in his plans to conquer South Korea, the necessity to educate a sometimes resisting population about China’s new place in a new world with new allies, to a hostility by the US, the one country to have ever deployed an atomic bomb.

The peace signature campaign of 1950 was at the intersection of the international, national and local dimensions of this new situation. The appeal had been formulated at a World Peace Council congress in Stockholm in March 1950 (“Ergebnis der Unterschriftensammlung zur Ächtung der Atombombe,” 1950: 2). On 30 March 1950, the secretary-general of the World Peace Council, Jean Laffitte, sent a letter to the national peace committees, demanding that “hundreds of millions of signatures” should be collected (Laffitte, 1950b: 2). Hence, a propaganda campaign started “in the press, through fliers, posters, the radio, public assemblies, press conferences, etc.” (Laffitte and Borsari, 1950: 2). From there, the signature campaign went underway, organized locally by the various national peace committees and under the, at least attempted, close supervision of World Peace Council central in Paris, which supplied propaganda materials, from “signature notebooks” (“Cahier de Signatures,” 1950) to reports on campaign successes in other countries (Laffitte, 1950d), statements by prominent individuals on why they had signed (Boulier, 1950), and booklets designed to invalidate any arguments against signing (Guyot, 1950a: 1).

China started its activities on 1 May, following the above-mentioned announcement in the *People’s Daily*. Drawing upon some of the repertoire of earlier mass campaigns, such as the Yan’an Rectification Movement and the land reform campaigns of the civil-war era (on the Yan’an Rectification Movement: Skocpol, 1979: 260; on land reform: Li L., 2014: 221; Perry, 1980: 240), the Chinese Peace Committee with support from the Central Committee of the CCP instructed Party and mass organizations of lower levels to conduct the campaign. Addressing the string of various echelons of Party organizations, from the Politburo to the regional branches of the Central Committee, “all provincial and municipal Party committees” and – interestingly, for a peace campaign – “all Party committees of military regions of field armies”, the Central Committee wrote on 23 May 1950 that at every level, the new mass organizations should go out, conduct propaganda and collect signatures on the appeal. Among these new organizations were “branches” of the Chinese Peace Committee, but also other organizations and *danwei* like “factories, troops, schools and peasant associations” (CCCCP, 2013a: 64). Mobilizing these new organizations had been a method to break old power structures and consolidate CCP power ever since the land reforms of the civil-war era (Li L., 2014: 226; Skocpol, 1979: 262; Perry, 1980: 238–40). The campaign was, in other words, part of the newly born state’s nation building. As in the Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries and the Three Antis (Yang K., 2006: 54; Yang K., 2009: 51), the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party gave out quotas for how many signatures should be collected. In May 1950, these were 30 million signatures (CCCCP, 2013a: 64). In August, after the outbreak of the Korean War, this was upped to 200 million signatures, with detailed instructions being given on how many signatures should be obtained by which region (CCCCP, 2013b: 250–51).

Among the organizations that set out to collect signatures was the *People’s Daily*. On 15 May 1950, the newspaper set up a “signature place” on Wangfujing Street, which was open from 7 AM till 7.30 PM (Renmin ribao, 1950c; Renmin ribao, 1950d). It was furnished with a “red poster [with the words] ‘comrades who love peace, please come here to sign’”. The Stockholm Appeal itself was laid out on a table, written on a “long red cloth”, with “pens” ready to be used (Renmin ribao, 1950d). To this stall, people had come “in a never-ending stream from morning to evening”, *People’s Daily* claimed. While queueing to sign, they listened to propaganda on the campaign “broadcasting non-stop” from speakers, and they could also direct any questions to *People’s Daily* employees (Renmin ribao, 1950c). The *People’s Daily*’s signature campaign also aimed to reach more remote regions, when the newspaper asked its readers in the provinces to submit signatures by post (Renmin ribao, 1950b).

Similar activities were conducted in Shanghai’s Tilanqiao District. According to a report, the District People’s Government had “convened the Youth Committee and primary schools and assigned them to lanes, streets and districts”, and it also “convened about ten defense teams to mobilize them for the peace signature campaign”. First, the District Government had to bring the views of the defense teams themselves in line, some of whom felt that: “When we oppose the atomic bomb, isn’t it [the fact that] we don’t have an atomic bomb that we oppose?” After it had been explained to them that “their way of thinking is wrong”, the teams “conducted discussions on methods and ways of the signature [campaign]”, whereupon they hit the streets. The “method” there was similar to that deployed by the *People’s Daily*: They laid out “a signature paper on a table at the entrance to the lane”. The defense teams were assigned to conduct propaganda on the campaign and to also go into the streets in teams to get people to sign. They then collected the “responses of the masses” 群众反映 and counted the signatures obtained – 6003 signatures were reported (Tilanqiao quwei xuanchuanbu, 1950: 2).[[1]](#endnote-1)

# Bellicose peacefulness

Unlike many of the earlier and later campaigns, the peace signature campaign was not violent. The Central Committee of the CCP even emphasized that “it was strictly forbidden [to use] force and commands” (CCCCP, 2013a: 64). However, the notion of peace propagated in it did not preclude violence. It promoted a bellicose understanding of peacefulness and even of peace. While the language of talking about war was regulated (CCCCP, 2013a: 63), as I outline below, the way of talking about peace was not. Instead, both actors in the PRC and the World Peace Council used, without visible semantic differentiation, a cluster of expressions to invoke the various functions of the peacefulness claim, from bloc building to increasing international prestige. “Peace”, that is, the status, was in Chinese usually simply called *heping* 和平 (and in the World Peace Council discourses, for example, “paix” in French or “Frieden” in German). “Peacefulness”, that is, the inclination to peace, was spoken about as “loving peace” 爱好和平 (Renmin ribao, 1950d; CPPCC, 2013; Li Y., 1954), but also as “protecting peace” (“protecting world peace”, 保卫世界和平(Li Y., 1954: 36) or “peace protector” 和平保卫者 [Jiang, 1950: cover page]), “fighting for peace” (争取和平 [Renmin ribao, 1950f]), or sometimes in the form of “peacefully liberating” 和平解放, “peacefully solving” 和平解决 (Renmin ribao, 1956; Renmin ribao, 1952). This kind of rhetoric was shared by World Peace Council central and its national committees (“la lutte pour la paix” [De Grada and Lafitte, 1950: 1], “la lutte pour le maintien de la paix” [“Prix internationaux de la paix,” 1953], “der friedliebenden Völker” [“Ergebnis der Unterschriftensammlung zur Ächtung der Atombombe,” 1950: 2], „Alle Völker lieben den Frieden“ [Rachad, 1955: 1], „Kampf für den Frieden“ [Laffitte, 1950a: 11]).

Both peace and peacefulness could be understood as bellicose. For example, the journal *World Knowledge* published a cartoon in September 1950, which depicted peace doves attacking a United States plane. One of the doves held a banner with the words “Protect the peace, resist American planes invading my country’s territorial airspace!” 保卫和平抗议美机侵犯我国领空！ (Liu X., 1950) The peace dove had by then become a very popular symbol of the World Peace Council and its community, after in 1949 the French Communist Party started using the painting of a dove by Picasso for the World Peace Congress (Rosenthal, 2010: 502). On the cover of a book with the title *The World Peace Movement* (1950), muscular hands with the inscription “peace protector” tied a man with a dollar sign painted on him to a skeleton with the inscription “war” on its helmet. The man with the dollar sign might have symbolized American capitalism, which was, in Marxist-Leninist theory, deemed to be the cause of war (Yin, 1971: 12). For example, in his speech in Stockholm in March 1950, secretary-general Laffitte had compared the “warmongers” to “beasts of prey” that were “surrounded by the constantly strengthened peace camp”. It was “a law of our fight” that at some point the “warmongers” had to “finally submit to the peace wish of the peoples” (Laffitte, 1950a: 1).

This bellicose peace could even serve as a justification for war, in this context the Korean War. In October 1950, the Chinese Committee of the Council for the Protection of World Peace was merged with the Committee to Resist America and Aid Korea (Tong, 2011: 21). The group’s new name was Chinese People’s Committee for the Protection of World Peace and the Resistance against the American Aggression 中国人民保卫世界和平反对美国侵略委员会. It was telling that, when this bulky name was abbreviated, the committee came to be called Headquarters of the Chinese People’s Resistance to America and Aid for Korea 中国人民抗美援朝总会, with the reference to “peace” having disappeared (Tong, 2011: 21). This was, of course, the time when the PRC entered the Korean War on the side of North Korea.

What exactly motivated the PRC to do so has been a subject of much academic debate. There appears to be a consensus that ever since 1949 North Korea under Kim Il-sung planned to retake the south (Shen and Li, 2011: 26; Xu, 2013: 65; Zuo, 2003: 111–12). For this purpose, Kim needed help from the SU or the PRC. The precise degree of their willingness or reluctance to wage the war, however, is unclear. Some argue that both countries seemed reluctant – the SU, because it feared a direct confrontation with the atomic-bomb-endowed US (Shen and Li, 2011: 29), the PRC because it wanted to focus its forces on conquering Taiwan (Shen and Li, 2011: 32–33; Xu, 2013: 67; Zuo, 2003: 114). In the end, however, Stalin pushed and Kim Il-sung tricked (by simply attacking South Korea) Mao Zedong into entering the war (Shen and Li, 2011: 24–25; Zuo, 2003: 116–18; Xu, 2013: 65–67). Other opinions hold that, on the contrary, the PRC was quite willing to enter the war (Dmitrii Volkogonov cited in Shen and Li, 2011: 26) or that it at least made war preparations very speedily after North Korea had crossed the 38th parallel on 25 June 1950 (J. Chen, 1994: 154). Whatever the precise reasons, the United Nations, under the leadership of the US, passed a resolution deciding to enter the war on the side of South Korea on 27 June 1950, and the PRC crossed the border to Korea on 25 October.

The former peace committee, now in its new identity as the Chinese People’s Committee for the Protection of World Peace and the Resistance against the American Aggression, therefore began to conduct anti-American Korean War propaganda activities (Beijing shi di-er jie di-san ci ge jie renmin daibiao huiyi, 2001) and churned out materials on both peace and the Korean War. Among its titles were *Important reports and resolutions of the First Meeting of the World Peace Council*, *A selection of Resist America Aid Korea songs* or *How to launch the Resist America Aid Korea movement in the countryside?* (Zhongguo renmin kang Mei yuan Chao zonghui, 1951c; Zhongguo renmin kang Mei yuan Chao zonghui, 1951a; Zhongguo renmin kang Mei yuan Chao zonghui, 1951d).

The committee also sent three waves of Chinese People’s Solidarity Delegations to the Volunteers in Korea 中国人民赴朝慰问团.[[2]](#endnote-2) These Delegations consisted of people from a broad spectrum of backgrounds (Zhongguo renmin kang Mei yuan Chao zonghui, 1951b). Some of them were “arts work troops”, who performed operas, songs and dances for the soldiers (Qin, 1996: 38), and others “regular solidarity delegates” (Tong, 2011: 22), who mainly held meetings with a variety of people affected by the war in Korea (Zhang Q., 2011: 58–63). The Delegations’ official task was to “show solidarity with [lit. ‘comfort’] the Chinese People’s Volunteers’ Army and the Korean People’s Army, who bravely wage war against the American aggression at the Korean front” (Zhongguo renmin kang Mei yuan Chao zonghui, 1951b; CCCCP, 2013c: 47–48).

Zhang Qiyuan 张启元, a student from Furen University in Beijing, was among those sent to Korea in 1951 (Zhang Q., 2011: 56). Her “solidarity” activities included holding a midnight propaganda seminar with factory workers near Pyongyang, talking to American prisoners of war and interacting with Chinese soldiers (Zhang Q., 2011: 58–63). As important as visiting Korea was “stage two” (Tong, 2011: 24) of the process. This consisted of reporting about the “the achievements of the brave war fought by the Chinese People’s Volunteers’ Army and the Korean People’s Army, and [about the] savage and ruthless criminal acts of American imperialism” upon returning home (Zhongguo renmin kang Mei yuan Chao zonghui, 1951b). Zhang Qiyuan, for example, was sent to visit Chinese “factories and schools” to talk about the “heroic achievements” of the Volunteers’ Army, who “did not fear the cold, did not care if they would live or die, and defeated the American imperialist aggression” (Zhang Q., 2011: 63). The new version of the Chinese Peace Committee was now conducting all-out war propaganda.

# Aggressive war

The bellicosity of peacefulness and of peace was not a notion newly introduced with the Korean War, but drew upon roots in international political thinking that went back to the end of World War I. It hinged upon the conception that not all wars are bad, but that some are good or “just”, even in the service of peace and that they were thus peaceful (as was exemplified by the cartoon of the shooting peace doves). As the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party stated in May 1950, when giving instructions on propaganda surrounding the peace signature campaign: “When we conduct a propaganda campaign against a new war and against nuclear weapons, we must pay attention to all of the following points: a) We must not simply say that we oppose war and protect peace. We must say that we oppose aggressive war and protect world peace. The Chinese people’s liberation war [to retake Taiwan and Tibet] is a great contribution to the opposition of aggressive war and the protection of world peace.” (CCCCP, 2013a: 63)

Cheng Kai claims that this is one of the modifications made by China to the Stockholm Appeal (the other one being that the peace signature campaign was more about peace rather than against nuclear weapons) (Cheng, 2013: 78–79). But the notion of “aggressive war” was not specific to China, nor even to the Eastern Bloc, but could be found in the Western Bloc too. It predated the Cold War era and went back to the hour of the birth of “collective security” after the First World War. During that war, the Allies had started to argue that the Central Powers were fighting an “aggressive war” (Bush, 2002: 2330–31). After Versailles, “aggressive war” became a key slogan for the sort of war that was to be prevented through the newly emerging framework of “collective security”, and it was codified in a series of treaties and frameworks, among them the Kellog-Briand Pact of 1928 and a 1927 declaration of the Assembly of the League of Nations, the first collective security organization (Bartman, 2009: 30). The idea behind collective security is that a community of states teams up against a force that is engaging in an aggressive war (Mearsheimer, 1994: 26).

That this approach spawns a bellicose form of peacefulness is not only debated among theorists today (Betts, 1992: 7, 17). It was also the reason why the critics of Woodrow Wilson, one of the founding fathers of collective security, accused him of being a “militarist” (Claude, Jr., 1964: 96). In the decades after World War I, the charge of “aggressive war” (or similar expressions, such as “breach of peace”, which essentially denoted the same thing) came to be invoked in a variety of political lawsuits, from the notorious Moscow Trials of 1936-37 to the Nuremberg and Tokyo Trials (Moscow: Hirsch, 2008: 703; Nuremberg: Shklar, 1964: 171–79; Kestenbaum, 2016: 53; Bush, 2002: 2325; Tokyo: Shklar, 1964: 179–87). The career of the term did not end there, but it lasts until the present. “Aggressive war” is condemned in the Charter of the United Nations (UN, 1945:sec. VII), and it was codified in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court of 1998 “as a ‘core’ international crime” (Kestenbaum, 2016: 55).

The Chinese translation for “aggressive war”, “*qinlüe zhanzheng*” 侵略战争, technically means “invasion war”. But it was used to participate in the global discourse about “aggressive war” as outlined above. *Qinlüe zhanzheng* first appeared in the 1920s (Shenbao, 1929) and gained currency in the 1930s in the context of the Second World War. The “aggressors” then were, unsurprisingly, identified as the Japanese (Shenbao, 1937; Shenbao, 1939) and the other Axis Powers and their allies (Liu N., 1935: 209; Jiefang, 1938: 20). In articles of the time, “*qinlüe zhanzheng*” often served as a way to express that China was engaged in a global, “just” fight against a global aggression, not in a merely local, potentially morally ambiguous fight (Xin Zhonghua, 1945; Jiefang, 1938: 21).

While there has been much agreement that “aggressive wars” are unjust, a conceptual and legal difficulty has been presented by the question of how to distinguish an “aggressor” from another type of war-waging party (Kestenbaum, 2016: 57–60; Betts, 1992: 17; Walzer, 1978: 53–58). This issue was, for example, a stumbling block during the Tokyo Trials, where the US justice, Joseph Keenan, had framed “aggressive war” as any war that tried to uproot the *status quo*. Unsurprisingly, this was read as a justification to maintain the imperialist *status quo* and was, consequently, denounced by Justice Radhabinod Pal from India (Shklar, 1964: 180; Sellars, 2013: 236–38). Communists, however, had by that time solved the issue for themselves. In 1941, the Chinese journal *Study* declared that “aggressive wars” were fought by “imperialism against colonies or semi-colonies” (Xuexi, 1941a: 306). “Wars against aggression”, however, were wars that “matched the interests of the masses”. Therefore, the “difference” between “wars of aggression” and “wars against aggression” was not a matter of “who started the war” or of “who has first sent soldiers onto whose territory”. Instead, it was a matter of who fought for the “interests of the people” and even of “whether the reins of power can be held in the hands of the masses” (Xuexi, 1941b: 306). In other words, Communist countries could, by definition, not fight “aggressive wars” but only “wars against aggression”.

The fight against “wars of aggression” was also linked to anti-imperialism, which had been a long-standing agenda in China, endorsed not only by the CCP but also their rivals, the GMD (Smith, 2017). The idea that connected “aggressive wars” and imperialism went back to Lenin, who had claimed that imperialism was the “highest stage of capitalism”, because the (in Lenin’s time) present “monopolist” capitalism was producing “[a]n enormous ‘superfluity of capital’“ (Lenin, 1987: 216). This “superfluity of capital” was invested in the colonies (Lenin, 1987: 217). Capitalism, furthermore, “inevitabl[y]” lead to war because, according to Lenin, war paralleled class conflict, which existed in capitalist societies, but not in communist ones (Yin, 1971: 11–12). Fighting imperialism and fighting “aggression” could therefore be considered to be part of one and the same “peaceful” endeavor, and in a Cold War era and a time of bloc thinking, the imperialists were soon identified with the United States and the West more broadly. This notion was, for example, endorsed by the World Peace Council Community. In March 1950, secretary-general Jean Laffitte wrote that “the cause of war is only to be traced back to the existence of imperialist groups, which are based in the United States and various other countries” (Laffitte, 1950a: 14). The goal of the world peace movement was therefore to “reveal war crimes”, “to keep them at bay” and “denounce” pro-war activities (Laffitte, 1950a: 17). Consequently, the speeches made during the World Peace Council’s congresses mainly consisted, not of trying to find solutions to international conflicts, but of denouncing “imperialism” and “aggression” and declaring how one’s country had suffered under them (Rachad, 1955: 1; Saranankara, 1955: 2; Spoor, 1955: 1).

When communist ideas spread to China, Lenin’s notions about the causes of war made their way there too. Mao Zedong, for example, adopted them in the 1930s (Yin, 1971: 20–21). The expressions “imperialism” and “aggression” now often came to be used together in Chinese documents (Jiefang, 1938: 20; Xuexi, 1941a; Jiang, 1950: 18; CPPCC, 2013: 171). Fight against “imperialist aggression”, thus, could be considered “peaceful” by the 1950s. The 1950 book *The World Peace Movement* explained, “waging war and peace are sometimes close brothers”, since “the goal of waging war is sometimes peace” (Jiang, 1950: 18). An example for this, according to the book, was the fight against “the aggression of American imperialism” in Korea, but also other anti-imperialist fights, as well as China’s attempts to “liberate” Taiwan and Tibet (Jiang, 1950: 18–19). Peacefulness could thus be brutal and even bellicose. This was also the conceptual framework about war and peacefulness that underlay the Central Committee directive of May 1950, which demanded not to mobilize against “war”, but only against “aggressive war” (CCCCP, 2013a: 63).

Since the ideas of “collective security” and “aggressive war” were born in a time before the Cold War, they were shared in both the Western and the Eastern Bloc. Consequently, the West equally framed its entry into the Korean War on the side of South Korea as a fight against “aggression”. This was reflected in the resolution passed in the United Nations Security Council of 27 June 1950, which launched the war. Since the UN Security Council was then being boycotted by the Soviet Union, it was *de facto* in the hands of the West (Chesterman, 2014: 489). This “Resolution concerning the complaint of aggression” of 27 June 1950, submitted by the United States, stated that North Korea’s attack on the South “constitutes a breach of the peace” and “that urgent military measures are required to restore international peace and security” (UNSC, 1950b: 1).

When Yugoslavia, which was not aligned with the West but at the time also at odds with the Soviet Union, proposed to invite a North Korean delegate to the table and to find a peaceful solution, this proposal was immediately crushed (UNSC, 1950a: 6). The Taiwanese delegate (at the time representing “China”) claimed that mediation “does not serve the cause of peace” but “would only serve aggression and favour the aggressor” (UNSC, 1950a: 11). The Republic of China on Taiwan, of course, had national interests at stake in the Korean War. The US under President Truman were prepared to leave Taiwan to conquest by the PRC by 1949, according to contemporary scholar Qiao Zhaohong, a decision that was only reversed by the onset of the Korean War. Aware of this, the ROC was therefore very keen on that war and the opportunity it provided to establish Taiwan as an important anti-Communist force in East Asia (Qiao, 2005: 94–95, 98). As is well-known, the US draft resolution was accepted by all but three (one rejection being Yugoslavia and two abstentions being due to delegates’ inability to consult with their governments on short notice) (UNSC, 1950a: 16). The Yugoslavian draft was rejected by everybody but Yugoslavia (with the abstention of the two countries with the communication issues) (UNSC, 1950a: 17).

But before assessing bellicose peacefulness as a Cold War distortion, it is worth considering that comparable notions exist until the present day, for example in Western academia in the fields of Peace Studies and Philosophy. The founding father of modern Peace Studies, the sociologist Johan Galtung, for example, distinguishes between “negative peace” and “positive peace”. “Negative peace”, according to Galtung, is the absence of war. “Positive peace”, often seen in Peace Studies as the superior variation, includes the “absence of structural violence” (Galtung, 2013: 173), that is, the presence of things like “human rights, economic fairness and opportunity, democratization, and environmental well-being and sustainability” (Barash, 2010: 146). This, cynically speaking, means peace coupled with a certain worldview. From here it is only a small logical step to justifying military intervention in order to create this worldview in a country that may be experiencing an absence of war (“negative peace”), but not “positive peace”.

A second example is the “democratic peace theory”, which claims that democracies do not wage war against each other. The Philosopher John Rawls, for example, argues “that a society of democratic peoples, all of whose basic institutions are well-ordered by liberal conceptions of right and justice (though not necessarily by the same conception), is stable for the right reasons” (Rawls, 1999: 53). By “stable for the right reasons”, he means that adherence to international law is not forced upon the peoples, but that there is a “process that leads peoples, including both liberal and decent societies, to accept willingly and to act upon the legal norms embodied in a just Law of Peoples” (Rawls, 1999: 44). As Nicholas Rengger points out, “democratic peace theory” can spawn the logic that world peace would exist if only all countries were democracies, and that it is therefore an act of peace to turn states into democracies, if necessary by military means. This, Rengger states, was an idea underlying the military actions under George W. Bush which followed upon 11 September 2001 (Rengger, 2016: 51). The perceived relevance of “democratic peace theory” shows that there is a consequentialist logic – that is, a logic that judges actions by their consequences – operating in the ethics of war and peace that, conceptually speaking, moves one into close proximity of the other.

The same consequentialism permeates certain brands of “just war” theory (Taylor, 2017: 18). In Europe, “just war” theory goes back to “the Christianisation of the Roman Empire” (Tsagourias and White, 2015: 5), and was especially formulated by Augustine, who argued that war was never an end in itself but had, as its ultimate goal, peace (Tsagourias and White, 2015: 5; Coady, 2008: 264–66). “Just war” debates were later taken out of their religious context, for example by Grotius in the 17th century (Tsagourias and White, 2015: 6–7), and are nowadays still discussed in Philosophy to negotiate a variety of questions that are applicable to current conflicts, from the permissibility of killing non-combatants in war (McMahan, 2006: 35–37) and the implications of self-defense for killing in war (Lazar, 2009) to questions of counterterrorism (Taylor, 2017). Often, philosophers see “just war” as standing in a (rather military) service of peace, since it is their goal to create “a better state of peace”, as Michael Walzer says (1978: 121), a “just peace” (Coady, 2008: 268), or “to make war redundant”, in the words of A.J. Coates (1997: 282).

# Functions of “bellicose peacefulness”

While thus rooted in broader political and philosophical thinking, the bellicose peacefulness as propagated in the PRC’s peace signature campaign in 1950 had purposes that were quite specific to the emerging international order of the Cold War: It was one of many means to position the PRC within this new order, to communicate this position to the Chinese population, to justify political actions resulting from this new order (such as the Korean War) and to gain national prestige within it, after having just emerged from an age of imperialist suppression.

## Bloc building

While the Stockholm Appeal technically sought to ban all nuclear weapons, the propaganda around it made it clear that it was *de facto* directed against those owned by the United States. For example, when reporting on its signature campaign, the *People’s Daily* claimed that that an “old villager” had said right after signing: “Sign quickly! One name is one gun against US imperialism!” (Renmin ribao, 1950e) In a letter in June, which supported the signature campaign, the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference also railed against the “aggressive clique of imperialism” (CPPCC, 2013: 171). In other words, since bellicose peacefulness meant being against someone, the PRC could use the peace signature campaign to educate its population in the ways of bloc thinking; to persuade the Chinese population, as Cheng Kai argues, that in a time of “leaning to one (namely the SU’s) side”, the US was not the ally from World War II, but imperialist enemy of the Cold War (Cheng, 2013: 75–76).

A campaign against nuclear weapons was, of course, very well suited to mobilize against the United States, since they had been the only ones to ever deploy them, namely in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. While the Soviet Union had successfully tested its first atomic bomb in August 1949 (Zhang Z., 2017: 109), the United States were also still far ahead in 1950 in terms of the quality of their nuclear weapons (Horsburgh, 2015: 42). The reason for the SU’s lagging-behind was that it had stopped support for nuclear research in the early 1940s, because of the invasion by Germany in 1941 and because it had not felt that it was sufficiently application-oriented. Creating an atomic bomb had seemed unfeasible at the time (Craig and Radchenko, 2008: 39–43). But simultaneously, nuclear-weapons research had been in full swing in the United States in the Manhattan Project since 1942 (Craig and Radchenko, 2008: 4–7). When the full extent of the US’s, and also Britain’s, research became evident to Stalin a year later, the project was resumed (Craig and Radchenko, 2008: 49). Of course, it was made a priority after August 1945, and the Soviet Union started building a whole “nuclear-engineering decision-making and management system” (Zhang Z., 2014). This comprised factories and research institutes all across Eastern Europe, a bureaucracy that directed nuclear-weapons research and a spy network that learned about Western nuclear research (Zhang Z., 2014: 38–43; Zhang Z., 2017: 111). But by 1950, the SU had not yet fully caught up with the United States, and the US’s nuclear weapons were therefore perceived as a major threat for the SU and the whole Eastern Bloc. Consequently, the United States’ nuclear weapons were well suited to incite emotions against them.

## Prestige in the Eastern Bloc

In addition to convincing the population of the PRC’s new place in a new international order, a second goal was to persuade international allies that the PRC had emerged from its powerlessness of the imperialist age and become an important force within the new order of the Cold War. In other words, internationally, the PRC used the peace signature campaign to gain prestige within the World Peace Council and the wider Communist community. This goal becomes apparent from the seeming absurdity of a signature campaign against nuclear weapons. In the words of one “worker” in Shanghai’s Tilanqiao District: “Signing [the Appeal] cannot stop the atomic bomb.” (Tilanqiao quwei xuanchuanbu, 1950: 3). It also, one could point out further, does not bring about world peace.

The official goal of the campaign, as indicated by the World Peace Council and national-level institutions, among them those in China, was to show the people’s support for peace. Jean Laffitte wrote on 30 March 1950 upon introducing the Stockholm signature campaign that petitions like it “bear witness to the movements of public opinion” (Laffitte, 1950b: 1). The Chinese Political Consultative Conference claimed in June 1950 that the campaign “proved the urgency of mankind’s love for peace” (CPPCC, 2013: 172). The trouble, however, was that these actors of the higher echelons were convinced that their populations were not actually taking the campaign seriously and that the campaign was being done superficially (ironically, this was overly pessimistic, and many people at the grassroots were actually quite enthusiastic [Harrison, 2013: 109]). The view was formulated poignantly at the other end of the Eastern Bloc, by the (Eastern) German Committee of the Partisans for Peace, who lamented the campaign’s “mechanical” nature consisting in a “hunt for numbers records” (Willmann and Becker, 1950: 3). The Central Committee of the CCP showed itself wary of this danger too, when it warned on 4 August 1950 that “the signature campaign must be conducted conscientiously, and not superficially” (CCCCP, 2013b: 250). In the same “directive”, however, it had announced that China should obtain 200 million signatures by November 1950, which marked the end of the campaign (CCCCP, 2013b: 250–51). When only “over 118,590,000” signatures were reported in September, panic appeared to set in, and the call for a “conscientious” campaign disappeared. “Now we are still one and a half months away from the time of the Second World Peace Congress [the end of the campaign]. Every place should work hard to fight for completing the planned number of signatures in October.” (CCCCP, 2013d: 136)

Room for fraud had existed before this point. For example, in the *People’s Daily*’s campaign, there was apparently no control mechanism that kept people from signing twice. Especially the postal signatures were open to cheating, since the newspaper instructed that *“*illiterate workers and peasants can sign through a proxy, after having given their consent” (Renmin ribao, 1950b). According to Henrietta Harrison, some people signed more than once (Harrison, 2013: 109). There also appeared to have been no mechanism that prevented the reporting of wrong numbers. But this intensified after September 1950. Instructions from the Central Committee now did not encourage thorough propaganda anymore, but merely what their German colleagues had called the “mechanical hunt for numbers records” (Willmann and Becker, 1950: 3).

Since the national-level actors were apparently not convinced that public opinion was very much swayed and reflected, why was it so important to gain the 200 million signatures (or to be able to say that they had been obtained)? The point, I argue, was to gain prestige as a peaceful country within the World Peace Council community, which could then translate into a more powerful voice when trying to push through other agendas, which were not necessarily peaceful.

When a country organized a signature campaign, this was reported in World Peace Council documents (Peace News, 1953b; Peace News, 1953a), and constant comparisons were made about which country had the most success in conducting propaganda and in collecting signatures in this and other campaigns. For example, in a letter of 17 April, Laffitte specified that “in Great Britain, 200 scholars have spoken out against the H-Bomb”; and that, in the Soviet Union, “in all Soviet factories, the workers sign the Stockholm Appeal, [and that] laborers, farmers, scholars, intellectuals and artists have spoken out favorably by the millions” (Laffitte, 1950c: 1). In November 1950, the Council announced that “so far, 500,049,217 people have signed the Stockholm Appeal”, followed by a detailed list of which country had obtained how many (“Albania 685,000, Egypt 12,000, … China 225,000,000, … Ivory Coast 100,000, … Japan 5,870,000, … Korea 6,000,000 …” [“Ergebnis der Unterschriftensammlung zur Ächtung der Atombombe,” 1950: 2]). China’s efforts in conducting propaganda (Laffitte, 1950a: 18) and obtaining signatures (“Bericht von Jean Laffitte,” 1955: 7)[[3]](#endnote-3) were consequently praised in the World Peace Council. Vice versa, national committees that had only collected relatively few, for example because they were based in non-Communist countries, faced great embarrassment at World Peace Council congresses. At the 1955 Congress in Helsinki, the Italian delegate was visibly downcast because Italy’s peace committee had only obtained 11 million signatures, not on the Stockholm Appeal, but the later Vienna Appeal (Sereni, 1955: 2). Italy, the delegate stated, could not “compare to … countries like the Soviet Union or China” (Sereni, 1955: 1). The number of signatures obtained was treated as an objective, almost scientific, measurement of peacefulness.

This prestige could be translated into greater sway when trying to get the World Peace Council to adopt certain agendas and resolutions. For instance, when inviting to a congress in Damascus, the Syrian Committee of the Defenders of Peace attempted to prove its worth by referring to the 400 million Syrian people that had signed the Stockholm Appeal (Guyot, 1950b: 3).[[4]](#endnote-4) Mongolia complained that it was not admitted to the United Nations even though “its complete adult population” had “unanimously” signed the Stockholm Appeal (Schirendib, 1955: 5). Guo Moruo evidenced China’s peacefulness at the Vienna Congress of 1951 by reference to the “223,739,545” signatures on the Stockholm Appeal, which was even exceeded by the signatures on a later appeal. In the rest of the speech, Guo Moruo protested against the United States’ resistance to China’s admittance to the United Nations, but he also rallied support for more explicitly martial agendas: He argued for the benefits of China’s engagement in Korea and praised China’s victory over Chiang Kai-shek (Guo, 1951: 7–8).

War-related benefits were also gained from a reputation for peacefulness, when China shaped World Peace Council-wide narratives about the Korean War: While it was certainly not the only factor, China put the full force of its reputation for peacefulness behind its endeavors to get the World Peace Council to put the bacteriological attacks on its agenda. These attacks had allegedly been conducted by the United States against North-East China and North Korea in January and February 1952 (Joliot-Curie, 1952: 1). It has proven impossible for historians to cut through the wartime propaganda of both sides, in order to determine with certainty if these attacks had actually happened (Wada, 2014: 217; J. Chen, 2001: 110). But a World Peace Council-sponsored expedition – which had been dispatched at the initiative of the Chinese Peace Committee (World Peace Council, 1952: 3) – concluded that the attacks had indeed taken place.

While this criticism of the United States was, of course, in line with the general anti-American thrust of the World Peace Council’s position within the Cold War, the PRC was instrumental in drawing the Council’s attention to the issue and in shaping the subsequent propaganda and discourses. In February 1952, Guo Moruo cabled Frédéric Joliot-Curie, the president of the World Peace Council, “raising a solemn protest against this cruel crime” and claiming that “the peaceful people of all countries may henceforth recognize the American aggressors as the most horrible enemy of world peace and human justice” (Guo, 1952: 1–2). This text was distributed to the national committees as a message written by “Mr. Guo Moruo, vice-president of the World Peace Council” (Guo, 1952: 1). In March, Joliot-Curie expressed his shock about the attacks, with reference to Guo’s letter, and with a mention of the “500 million men and women” that had signed the Stockholm Appeal worldwide and had thus denounced such actions (Joliot-Curie, 1952: 1). Secretary-general Laffitte forwarded statements on the bacteriological warfare given, among others, by the Chinese foreign minister Zhou Enlai and by Guo Moruo (Laffitte, 1952a: 1).

The effects of this were visible even at the grassroots in the Eastern Block. In April 1952, Laffitte distributed propaganda material submitted by China and Korea to the national peace committees, among them Eastern Germany. Among these materials was a “documentary film, which has been sent to us by the Chinese [Peace] Committee”, which had already been translated into several languages (Laffitte, 1952b: 1–2). National committees, such as the one of the GDR, organized meetings in which they denounced the United States’ actions (Arlt, 1952: 1), and collected protest resolutions from local associations and companies (Belegschaft der VVB Druck, 1952; Salomon and Zirkelleiterlehrgang I.G. Druck und Papier, 1952). Collecting huge amounts of signatures and being active in the World Peace Council had contributed to providing the PRC with the kind of prestige that enabled it to shape narratives about a war in the whole World Peace Council community.

## Resistance from the grassroots

While the peace signature campaign of 1950 thus did what the PRC state intended it to do on the international stage, it met with resistance at the local level: The grassroots did not buy the idea of bellicose peacefulness and the bloc building that came with it. This becomes clear from Tilanqiao District in Shanghai. As mentioned above, when local governments or mass organizations sent out their personnel to collect signatures, they also collected “reactions from the masses” (Tilanqiao quwei xuanchuanbu, 1950: 2). In a tidied-up form, these “reactions” made it into the national press (see the *People’s Daily*’s aforementioned “old villager”, who had said: “Sign quickly! One name is one gun against US imperialism!” (Renmin ribao, 1950e).)

However, Tilanqiao District’s “masses” were reported to have had other things to say, too. They expressed their approval of the campaign because they “feared the atomic bomb” or because they felt reassured that it prevented World War III (Tilanqiao quwei xuanchuanbu, 1950: 1). In other words, they were interested in a peace that meant the absence of war. Initial reactions in China after the atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki had celebrated the bombs as great and powerful weapons. But China’s common people had soon tied them to the danger of an imminent Third World War, Henrietta Harrison writes. By the early 1950s, therefore, the bombs had become the object of great fear among the population, which stood in contrast to Mao Zedong’s position that the A-bomb was a “paper tiger”, unable to defeat China (Harrison, 2013: 100–102; “paper tiger”: J. Chen, 1994: 18).

Tilanqiao District’s inhabitants also did not buy into the notion that there were “aggressive wars” and “just wars”: “We oppose any war.” (Tilanqiao quwei xuanchuanbu, 1950: 2), one person said. Consequently, they did not feel obliged to enter the Korean War either: “Protecting world peace and protecting China is ok. Protecting foreign countries, that we don’t want.” (Tilanqiao quwei xuanchuanbu, 1950: 2) Others picked up on the idea that the campaign was about bloc building, but they rejected it in no uncertain terms as just another form of subservience to a foreign, possibly even imperialist, power: “Chiang Kai-shek and America, Chairman Mao and the Soviet Union, Wang Jingwei and Japan – this is all the same.” (Tilanqiao quwei xuanchuanbu, 1950: 3) In this, Tianlanqiao’s “masses” were not alone, as Neil Diamant shows, according to whom people at the grassroots did not find themselves convinced of the new opposition to the United States and the idea that they, not the Japanese, were the “imperialists” (Diamant, 2010: 128–30) and “aggressors”. The notion of bellicose peacefulness, and the messages about the PRC’s position within the new international order of the Cold War that came with it and that was meant to cut down all the way from the World Peace Council to, in this case, Tilanqiao District, was not convincing to the grassroots.

# Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that the young PRC state pursued a dual strategy with the peace signature campaign in 1950: to gain prestige as a peaceful country within the Eastern Bloc and the wider (Communist) World Peace Council community; and to persuade its population that it was part of the Eastern camp. This hinged upon a notion of peacefulness that was bellicose. Its peace did not mean the absence of war, but war or at least a struggle against an opponent labelled the “aggressor”. This notion of bellicose peacefulness was not only endorsed by the World Peace Council. But as it drew upon political ideas about “aggressive war” that went back to the era before the Cold War, it was and is also deployed in the West. In a variation, bellicose peacefulness also lives on in Western academia in Peace Studies and in Philosophical “just war” theories.

Two points can be deduced from this. First of all, this case study on the peace signature campaign of 1950 speaks to these theories coming from Peace Studies and Philosophy, in that it hints at the dangers inherent in nonpacifist definitions of “peace” and “peacefulness”. “Peace” as the “absence of war” – what has been called “negative peace” – is often treated among scholars of peace and “just war” as an inferior form of peace (Galtung, 2013: 173; Coady, 2008: 268). A better version of peace, in this view, is one that “offer[s] something hopeful to the conquered”, in the words of the philosopher C.A.J. Coady (2008: 269), or a “positive peace”, to borrow from Johan Galtung (2013: 173). It is a peace with special characteristics, with the characteristics very often implying a certain worldview (a liberal one, in the case of many Western-based Peace Studies scholars). There is certainly merit to the idea that peace is, or should be, “no war plus a desirable worldview”. Life under a dictatorship that suppresses its own population might not be deemed a worthy peace. However, these supposedly superior forms of “positive” (Galtung, 2013: 173) or “thick” (Coady, 2008: 264) peace contain the conceptual potential to turn peacefulness, and even peace, into their very opposite: into war. The obvious reason is that this type of “thick” or “positive” peace needs to be created first, if necessary against the opposition of a community and through military force. However, once peacefulness is defined in this way, it runs danger of meaning nothing but “war”, at least in reality, if not in theory; and a reputation for peacefulness runs danger of being transformed into credentials to further war and hostility. This indicates that caution is in order when passing the overly optimistic assessment that a sufficient amount of “just wars” is going to eventually “make war redundant”, as A.J. Coates has put it (1997: 282).

Secondly, the embeddedness of Chinese peacefulness claims of 1950 in these traditions shows that the PRC was at that point trying to fit into an existing model, rather than creating an alternative model for ordering the world and creating peace. Such a project was, for example, proposed by Mohandas Gandhi with his concept of “nonviolence”. This was, in Karuna Mantena’s reading, an alternative “political realism”, which rejects the assumption that conflict is unavoidable (Mantena, 2012: 455). From within China, alternative models to create world peace and counter realism were and are proposed, for example, through theories based on the “tributary system” and “*tianxia*” 天下. In the 1940s, the jurist Luo Mengce 罗梦册 talked about a “*tianxia*­-state” which supposedly “preferred integration and harmony over rivalry and bloody competition”. This was part of a broader discourse which set up a dichotomy between a presumably more benevolent “kingly way” (*wangdao*), which, in this thinking, China exemplified, and a more aggressive “way of the hegemon” (*badao*), which was pursued by Western countries (Matten, 2016: 252). Similar alternative models for an international order are currently also proposed by Zhao Tingyang and David Kang (Zhao, 2011; Kang, 2007). In 1950, in an age of “leaning to one side”, however, the newly born People’s Republic of China was not trying to propose its own model of peace or of an international order, but rather to gain a reputation of peacefulness and carve out a position of prestige for itself within the newly emerging Cold War order. How this changed with the Sino-Soviet split would be an interesting matter for future research. In 1950, however, the peacefulness claim was not a framework that allowed insights into the PRC’s willingness or reluctance to wage war. It was a way to express, and therefore for us to observe, the position in the international order that China envisioned for itself.

**Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank (in alphabetical order) my colleagues Puck Engman, Elisabeth Schleep and Isaac Taylor for their invaluable feedback on this paper. My thanks also go to the peer reviewers for their very detailed and constructive feedback.

**Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**Funding**

This research has been funded by the Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft, Freiburg im Breisgau.

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# Author biography

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1. I would like to thank Henrietta Harrison for generously sharing her archival materials from the Shanghai Municipal Archives with me. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. “*Weiwen*” technically means “to comfort” or “to convey greetings”. However, it is translated in the 中华人民共和国国史百科全书 as used above, and I adopt this translation for the sake of simplicity (Deng, 1999: 480). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. This refers to China’s signatures on the later Vienna Appeal. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. This number must either be a typo or a mistake in the report, since the complete Syrian population did not number so many people. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)