Tibet, Korea, the Taiwan straits, Vietnam, Sumatra and the Hill States of Burma were the open sores of this painful transition from empire to nation, the glaring evidence that post-imperial state-making was only rarely consensual. Asia's immersion in the expanding Cold War masked the bitter reality of these local and regional conflicts.

As so often before in Eurasian history, China's role was crucial. By the end of 1950 its mainland had been unified under Communist rule. Mao's remarkable victory may have owed much to the 'peasant nationalism' of China's rural masses (kindled by hatred of Japan's occupation),[19] as well as to the appeal of the party's land reform programme. The proportions are still disputed.[20] But there was no doubt that China had once more resumed a premier place in East Asia, with a huge battle-hardened army. Under certain conditions, this might have resulted in an inward-looking policy of domestic reform that left China's Asian neighbours to their own devices. In the actual climate of the early 1950s, such an outcome was unlikely. Instead, the newregime's leaders adopted the viewof their republican predecessors, and the Ch'ing before them, that their rule would be safe only if the landward approaches to China were in trustworthy hands. They forcefully reasserted Beijing's authority in Tibet. When it seemed likely that northern Korea might fall under non-Communist control, they intervened massively in the Korean War. Two million Chinese served in Korea, and more than 150,000 died there.[21] Mao took a similar viewof China's frontier in the south. At the critical stage of the struggle between the Viet Minh and the French in northern Vietnam, Chinese military help and strategic 'advice' played a crucial part in France's crushing defeat at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954, the prelude to the end of its colonial power in Indochina.[22] Beijing's fear of encirclement sprang from the fact that its Kuomintang enemies had survived (on Taiwan) and with American help might resume the political struggle. For, despite the scale of their victory, Mao and his colleagues were all too aware that it had not been total. They faced the challenge of building a

newindustrial state on China's agrarian base – which would have to pay the bill. They had to anchor their power in a new social order – which would have to be fashioned. They had to defend a revolution.

The sense of threat from without as well as within precluded retreat into the splendid seclusion favoured by newdynasts in previous eras. It was dramatically symbolized by the denial of membership of the United Nations, instigated by America and reversed only in 1971. At first Chinese policy mixed caution and hope. The obvious urgency of an industrial programme, as well as the need to balance American help to the Kuomintang foe, drove the People's Republic into alliance with Stalin. In Korea and Vietnam in 1953–4, Beijing accepted a compromise peace of partition. After France's defeat in the First Indochina War, Chou En-lai sought to disarm regional fears (and stifle American influence) by soft-voiced diplomacy. But by the late 1950s Mao was convinced that harsher methods were needed. He mistrusted Moscow's call for coexistence with capitalism, and saw the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's summit diplomacy as a betrayal of China. Sino-Soviet solidarity lasted barely a decade. Faced with the hardening of American support for the Taiwan regime, Mao raised the military stakes by bombarding Quemoy, a close-in offshore island under Kuomintang rule. He countered the loss of momentum in China's transformation at home with an aggressive new strategy of rural collectivization, the so-called 'Great Leap Forward'. The redistribution of land from landlords to peasants turned out (as in Russia) to be only the prelude to the state's taking control. And in 1960 he approved Hanoi's insistent demand to resume the armed struggle (suspended since 1954) for a Communist victory in South Vietnam.[23] Mao's newcourse was to make China the sponsor of revolutionary violence against surviving colonial states, or those successor regimes that colluded with capitalism. His message was simple. Imperialism's overthrowwas far from complete. Decolonization must come – if it was to be real – by a great rural revolt of impoverished peasants: a global 'people's war' against the world's bourgeoisie.[24]

Mao's drastic programme for a post-imperial world aroused wide enthusiasm, intellectual and political, not least among those who hoped to savour its victory from a comfortable distance. In the 1960s and '70s it offered a hopeful alternative to the failures and compromises of post-colonial regimes. It attracted those who still hoped to reverse capitalism's unexpected revival in the post-war world. As we shall see in a moment, it achieved its most striking success in the special conditions of South East Asia. But on a wider view it was the containment of China and Maoist anti-imperialism that was really significant. In part this arose from the disruptive effects of Mao's political doctrines – especially his 'Cultural Revolution', a form of massive purge – on the Chinese economy. In part it reflected the revival of tension with China's great northern neighbour. But the most serious obstacle to Mao's ambitions grewout of the dramatic divergence between East Asia's two great states.

If China's turn towards Communism confounded most wartime predictions, no less surprising was the readiness of Japan (in John Dower's striking phrase) to 'embrace defeat'.[25] At the end of the war, Japan had been occupied by a large American garrison, military and civilian, nearly a million strong.[26] For more than six years, an American viceroy (for most of that time General Douglas MacArthur) held executive power, and his approval was needed for any major decision. Japan's sovereignty was suspended; Japanese were forbidden to travel abroad; no criticism was allowed of the occupation regime. A raft of reforms was designed to root out what were seen as the sources of Japan's militaristic imperialism. Women were enfranchised and the voting age was lowered, more than doubling the electorate. A new constitution prescribed by the occupiers barred the armed forces from a seat in the government and renounced war as an instrument of national policy. The great family-ruled business combines or *zaibatsu* were broken up. Land reform reduced the power of the landlords and doubled the proportion of those who farmed their own land to some 60 per cent.[27] Trade unions were encouraged. New textbooks were written,