

Looking at the 20-year debate over China's voice at the UN

By Marion A. Macpherson

The question of Chinese representation has been a problem for the United Nations since the government of the People's Republic of China gained effective control over Mainland China and the Chinese Nationalists withdrew to the island of Taiwan, claiming, however, to be the sole legal government of all of China, a claim they continue to maintain.

Over the years Canada has been required to take a position in the General Assembly of the United Nations on the question of Chinese representation and on two occasions has taken the initiative in suggesting ways to resolve this problem.

The first occasion was more than 20 years ago. The issue first came before the General Assembly in 1950 when resolutions were introduced seeking support for the immediate seating of the representatives of the People's Republic of China. The Canadian delegation submitted a resolution providing for the establishment of a Special Committee of Seven to consider the question of Chinese representation and to report back with recommendations to the same session of the General Assembly. It also proposed that, pending a decision by the General Assembly, the Nationalist Government delegates should continue to sit with the same rights as other representatives. This resolution was approved by a large majority and amounted, in effect, to the postponement of a decision on Chinese representation. Although the Special Committee held one meeting, the question was overshadowed by the Korean crisis and no further action was taken.

At the 1950 session, the General Assembly approved a resolution (396 (V)) recommending that, whenever more than one authority claimed to be the government entitled to represent a member state in the United Nations, and this question became a subject of controversy, the attitude adopted by the General Assembly should be taken into account in the other organs of the United Nations and the Specialized Agencies.



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Members of the delegation of the People's Republic of China take their seat in the UN General Assembly for the first time. From left to right: Deputy Foreign Minister Chiao Kuan-hua, Huang Hua, China's permanent representative at UN; and Fu Hao, his deputy.

For the next ten years no resolution to seat the representatives of the People's Republic of China was voted on in the General Assembly, although the question came up in various ways. Each time it did, the Assembly approved a resolution postponing consideration of any proposal to exclude representatives of the Nationalists or to seat representatives of the People's Republic of China.

This moratorium ended in 1961, when a proposal to change Chinese representation was considered but not approved by the General Assembly. In that year it was also agreed that any proposal to change the representation of China was an "important question" within the provisions of