

AMERICAN DIPLOMACY THROUGH THE LENS OF NON-STATE ACTORS:
THE CHINA HANDS, THE CHINA LOBBY, AND THE CHINESE CIVIL WAR

by

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Abstract:

With the Communist takeover of China in 1949, Sino-American relations deteriorated and Cold War hostilities took precedent. This thesis examines the role of American non-state actors – predominantly journalists and media tycoons – in this phase of twentieth century international relations. The traditional ‘loss of China’ narrative is debunked in favour of the alternative narratives provided by correspondents on the ground in China. These ‘China Hands’ believed the Kuomintang’s Chiang Kai-shek was a corrupt, autocratic leader; the Communists’ Mao Zedong was a genuine reformer. This worldview ran contrary to the ‘China Lobby’, which used its stateside influence to generate pro-Chiang and anti-Mao sentiment. Ultimately, the geographic and ideological milieu of each demographic influenced whether they would adopt a mainstream or alternative view of the Chinese Civil War. Though naive and subject to their own interpretative flaws, the China Hands did what they felt was ‘right’. In effect, they were able to transcend the emerging bipolar world order.

Chapter One – Historiography

Introduction:

The Chinese Civil War and the subsequent Communist victory in 1949 were transformative episodes in the history of American foreign policy and political culture. Within a classical Cold War framework, these events have been interpreted as a serious blow to American prestige and influence during an era of ideological bipolarity, hence the perceived “loss of China” to communism. The United States had supported the unsuccessful Nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi)¹, while the Soviets were thought to have conspired with Mao Zedong and the victorious Chinese Communist Party. This evaluation oversimplifies the Conflict’s legacy and implications for American foreign policy. In fact, many individuals on the ground during the Chinese Civil War transcended mainstream America’s interpretation of the Cold War. Their response to the rise of Communist China greatly differed from that of the power brokers in Washington.

This study will investigate the myriad American journalists and writers reporting from China throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Their body of work contributed alternative views to the United States public consciousness about Chiang, Mao and their respective parties. These predominantly left-leaning journalists and diplomats – known collectively as the ‘China Hands’ – felt hostile towards the authoritarian Chiang Kai-shek and his corrupt Kuomintang (Guomintang) regime. Indeed, many anticipated the inevitable success of Mao Zedong’s Communist Party and even sympathised with the apparent populist reform agenda it preached. China Hand rejection of Chiang made sense in the

¹ This thesis uses the *pinyin* system instead of other transliteration forms for Chinese. The only exceptions to this will be names more readily recognised in Wade-Giles or other Romanised forms, such as Sun Yat-sen, Chiang Kai-shek, or Kuomintang. In such cases, these names shall remain in their more familiar forms, although at their first mention *pinyin* versions will be supplied in parentheses. The only other exceptions will be when quoting sources that use other forms. These will not be altered.

context of international anti-fascism in the 1920s and 1930s and Second World War right-wing extremist. It did not, however, suit the developing anti-communism mentality of the postwar era. This thesis interrogates how the broad-level experiences of the China Hands was translated, co-opted and even censored back home in the United States.

Another focus is the post war ‘loss of China’ rhetoric that persisted amongst the American Right in the 1950s. The Truman administration was relentlessly accused of being ‘soft’ of communism and the China Lobby, a group of business and political elites, petitioned for continued support of Chiang Kai-shek’s dictatorial regime exiled on Taiwan. Moreover the fervent anti-communist sentiment that blossomed in these early Cold War years rendered formal relations with the Communist China impossible. Right-wing pundits exaggerated and misinterpreted the extent of a global communist conspiracy and targeted the China Hands in the field for their perceived unpatriotic accounts of the Chinese Civil War. The China Lobby’s response to the left-leaning China Hands was deeply influenced by the era’s anticommunism and conservative establishmentarianism.

This chapter outlines the major trends in Chinese Civil War and United States foreign policy historiography. The response from the American Right in the immediate aftermath of the loss of China was largely critical of the China Hands. The 1960s saw more critical analyses of the conflict, but it was not until Richard Nixon’s visit to China in 1972 that scholarship began taking the roles – and opinions – of the China Hands seriously. Once the legacy of McCarthyism had faded, former left-leaning diplomats published their own accounts of the Chinese Civil War without fear of vilification. Still, these histories were predominantly focused on state actors. The 1980s saw a greater emphasis on non-state actors, including foreign correspondents reporting from the field in China. That same decade Cold War historians started to look beyond traditional East-

West narratives. This thesis builds on the work of these trends, providing a fresh look at the Chinese Civil War through the lens of non-state actors such as journalists and writers both on the ground in China and at home stateside.

The ‘Loss of China’ Narrative:

When the Truman administration published the controversial *China White Paper* in August 1949, it was meant to absolve the administration of the unsettling Communist victory in China and blame the weakness of the Kuomintang regime. Although accurate on many levels, the document produced the complete opposite effect, as countless critics on the American Right interpreted it as proof of the Truman administration’s failure to contain communism. The Korean War in the early 1950s merely added fuel to the fire of the burgeoning anti-communist establishment in Washington. The “loss of China” was articulated by these figures as a devastating blow to American influence in an increasingly hostile and bipolar world order.

Many of these pro-Chiang factions were associated with the corporate interests that had traditionally existed in China. They built on a long history of Christian capitalism in the region. The Open Door policy, first outlined by Secretary of State John Hay in 1899, ensured a steady flow of foreign investment to the Asian nation from the United States business community. This collaboration helped create a powerful lobby group in Washington that ultimately aligned itself with the Kuomintang regime. This ‘China Lobby’ advocated continued financial and military support of Chiang Kai-shek’s defeated regime, even once exiled to Taiwan. It would also fervently oppose any diplomatic recognition of the Communist regime on the part of the United States government for decades.

A breadth of literature published after the Communists' rise to power helped cement this "loss of China" rhetoric in the American public consciousness. Freda Utley's *Last Chance in China* (1947) and John T. Flynn's *While You Slept* (1951) defended Chiang's regime and criticised the State Department, respectively. Also significant is Anthony Kubek's *How the Far East was Lost* (1963), which attributes the fall of the Kuomintang regime to the apathy and incompetence of the Truman administration. Collectively, these right-wing critics helped formulate the impression that the United States government had willingly allowed the Kuomintang to fall to the Communists. They also helped denigrate the China Hands, as the third chapter of this thesis illustrates.

Depoliticised scholarship on the Chinese Civil War was scarce in the immediate aftermath of the conflict. Most analyses, like the ones mentioned above, tended to be biased depending on the author's political leanings. Nevertheless some members of the academic community produced impartial and noteworthy scholarship; Herbert Feis' *The China Tangle*, published in 1953, and Tang Tsou's *America's Failure in China*, published in 1963, both offer similar narratives of the United States' inability to secure and maintain its interests in China. Both accounts focus on state actors and rely extensively on the *China White Paper* and the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series as primary source material. While these books are critical of both Democrats and Republicans, they still articulated China in terms of an American possession, thus confining them to the 'loss of China' narrative.

George Kennan's *American Diplomacy, 1900-1950*, published immediately after the 'loss of China,' concisely summarises mainstream opinion on American foreign policy in the early stages of the Cold War. He builds on previous writings such as his 1947 Long Telegram, arguing that the Soviet Union was an inherently expansionist

power. For the United States to neutralise the Soviet threat, a foreign policy of containment was required. Therefore Kennan's traditional account of the Cold War helped fuel the discourse surrounding China, where the United States had failed to contain communism. Early Cold War establishment voices helped entrench pro-Chiang, anti-communist scholarship as the dominant force in the literature.

Challenging the Traditional Narrative:

In the 1960s, the New Left academics began looking inward, producing some harsh commentaries on American foreign policy. William Appleman Williams' *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, originally published in 1959, became a seminal work in the New Left movement.² The argument here is that the United States has been an imperial power since its inception. The 'Open Door' (an initiative designed to guarantee American access to Chinese markets) provided a thin veil and strained justification for America's imperialist ambitions. Williams writes: "The immediate context was defined by the situation in China [...] Hay's objective was to open the way for the endless expansion of the American frontier in the name of self-determination, progress and peace."³ The Open Door policy was thus an extension of the Monroe Doctrine to the Far East. It embodied an essential concern amongst Americans at the time: "the immediate and long-range effectiveness of the expansion of their political economy."⁴

Williams notes that even in the summer of 1949, as the Chinese communists inched closer to victory in the civil war, the world looked "relatively manageable" from a

² J. A. Thompson, "William Appleman Williams and the 'American Empire,'" *Journal of American Studies* 7:1 (1973), 91.

³ William Appleman Williams, *Empire as a Way of Life* (New York: Oxford, 1980), 128.

⁴ *Ibid*, 129.

geopolitical standpoint. It was only the negligence of the United States “imperial elite” that complicated matters. He writes:

American leaders behaved differently. First in China, where a corrupt and disreputable government gave over in a disgrace to quasi-puritanical communist revolutionaries led by Mao Tse-tung. Mao immediately asked to open serious discussions with the United States. Truman and Acheson would have none of it, denying American officials permission even to talk with Mao [...] Mao was indicating, with the approval of his party’s Executive Committee, that he wanted to explore the possibility of becoming a Tito, of developing a socialist but independent China. In their wisdom, Truman and Acheson defined Mao as a puppet of Stalin.⁵

The imperial nature of the Truman doctrine and its containment policy is the focus of Williams’ criticism. Mao and his Communist Party were indeed open to the idea of establishing a formal and constructive relationship with the United States. It was only the closed-minded, anti-Communist worldview of the country’s leaders that prevented this.

Noam Chomsky, another figure of the New Left, is also noted for his criticism of American foreign policy. His 1967 book *American Power and the New Mandarins* offered many powerful insights on the nature of United States diplomacy in the midst of the divisive Vietnam War. Chomsky articulated a poignant and timely analysis of the conflict. He also situated Vietnam in a wider political and regional context. “There is a note of shrill desperation in the recent defense of the American war in Vietnam,” wrote Chomsky. “Secretary Rusk broods about the dangers posed to us by a billion Chinese; the Vice-President tells us that we are fighting ‘militant Asian Communism’ with ‘its headquarters in Peking’ and adds that a Vietcong victory would directly threaten the United States.”⁶ In light of this powerful rhetoric, however, Chomsky is not convinced:

⁵ Williams, *Empire as a Way of Life*, 186.

⁶ Noam Chomsky, *American Power and the New Mandarins* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), 376.

We can point to the absurdity of the idea that we are ‘containing China’ by destroying popular and independent forces on its borders... We can ask why it is that those who make this claim do not suggest that an American expeditionary force be sent to Taiwan, to Rhodesia, to Greece, or to Mississippi, but only to Vietnam, where, they want us to believe, the master aggressor Mao Tse-tung is following a Hitlerian course in his cunning way.⁷

Though largely considered an outsider to the study of international relations, Chomsky offers valuable interpretations of American diplomacy.⁸ In *American Power and the New Mandarins*, he concludes: “the present world problem is not ‘containing China’ but containing the United States.”⁹

Perhaps most relevant to this study is the connection Chomsky draws between the popular upheavals in Asia and the civil war in Spain. In absence of proper knowledge regarding these Third World revolutions, he nevertheless finds the similarities striking:

The circumstances of Spain in the 1930s are not duplicated elsewhere in the underdeveloped world today, to be sure. Nevertheless, the limited information that we have about popular movements in Asia, specifically, suggests certain similar features that deserve much more serious and sympathetic study than they have so far received. Inadequate information makes it hazardous to try to develop any such parallel, but I think it is quite possible to note long-standing tendencies in the response of liberal as well as Communist intellectuals to such mass movements.¹⁰

He elaborates on this apparent connection in his footnotes for that chapter:

The scale of the Chinese Revolution is so great and reports in depth are so fragmentary that it would no doubt be foolhardy to attempt a general evaluation. Still, all the reports I have been able to study suggest that insofar as real successes were achieved in the several stages of land reform, mutual aid, collectivization, and formation of communes, they were traceable in large part to the complex interaction of the Communist party cadres and the gradually evolving peasant associations [...] It is interesting [...] to note the strong populist element in early Chinese Marxism.¹¹

⁷ Chomsky, *American Power*, 377.

⁸ Mark Laffey, “Discerning the Patterns of World Order: Noam Chomsky and International Theory after the Cold War,” *Review of International Studies* 29:4 (2003): 597.

⁹ Chomsky, *American Power*, 378.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 76.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 137.

Even in absence of concise reports on the events, Chomsky is aware of the capacity of the Chinese peasantry to transform the country. The “strong populist element” – i.e. the proletariat – is ultimately the force in opposition to the one being funded by the pro-capitalist United States government. Chomsky identifies macro similarities between China and Spain without also noting remarkable experiential and social connections for left-leaning correspondents.

The Implications of Sino-American Rapprochement:

Richard Nixon’s famous visit to China in 1972 was a major turning point in Sino-American relations.¹² Not only did it render the China Lobby obsolete, but it also generated renewed respect for former China Hands. Its reverberations were felt in the emerging historiography of China’s Civil War. That year, Ernest R. May and James C. Thomson Jr. published in *American-East Asian Relations*. Articles in this collection provided a more transparent account of the American involvement in the Chinese Civil War. Furthermore, E.J. Kahn Jr.’s 1975 book titled *The China Hands* is a great resource as it draws on the author’s own extensive interviews with Foreign Service men the likes of John Davies and John Service. Kahn’s sympathetic description of the careers of these diplomats (both born in China, both critical of Chiang, both impressed by Mao) represented a subtle shift in the historiography and public consciousness.

At the time of Sino-American rapprochement, an entire generation had passed since the Communist Revolution in China. The United States did not view the Asian nation in the same context. This led to new levels of critical analysis of the Chinese Civil

¹² See Margaret MacMillan, *Nixon in China: The Week That Changed the World* (Toronto: Viking Press, 2006).

War. Left-leaning Americans, once suppressed by McCarthyism and the China Lobby, were free to voice their opinions on China policy. For example, former China Hands such as Harold Isaacs had work republished; specifically 1958's *Scratches on Our Minds* was reissued in 1972 as *Images of Asia*. In the preface to this new edition, Isaacs addressed the parallel shift in Sino-American relations and Cold War historiography.¹³ In the spirit of détente, 'loss of China' rhetoric subsided and historians began approaching the Chinese Civil War from less of a Cold War mentality.

'Beyond' the Cold War:

As the Cold War came to a close, academics also began to stray from the European and American-centric, East-West narrative of the conflict. This trend allowed for fresh new insights regarding the Chinese Civil War. In 1986 Geir Lundestad published *East, West, North, South*, an early study of the global Cold War. He argues that China transcended the standard bipolar narrative that is usually associated with the conflict: "During the post-war period, China would illustrate the limitations even of the superpowers' influence."¹⁴ In the midst of the Second World War, Americans had high hopes for China as a future ally against the burgeoning Soviet bloc: "China suited Washington's plans for the post-war period perfectly. In relations between East and West, China, under the leadership of Chiang, would support the United States against the Soviet Union."¹⁵ Still, Lundestad explains how the backing of Chiang Kai-shek was not a perfect union: "Chiang's regime was authoritarian, corrupt and ineffective. Even so, there was no

¹³ Harold Isaacs, *Images of Asia: American Views of China and India* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), xiv.

¹⁴ Geir Lundestad, *East, West, North, South: Major Developments in International Politics, 1945-1986* (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1986), 62.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 63.

alternative. Leading circles in Washington considered Mao Tse-tung a communist who did have an independent streak, but who nonetheless cooperated with Moscow.”¹⁶ The traditional East-West dynamic is discredited in this account; Mao was certainly communist, but he was no Soviet stooge.

Lundestad also points out the tendency of the United States to support right-wing dictators; ideology and geopolitics trump morality, human rights, or self-determination. Chiang Kai-shek’s regime was certainly repressive and corrupt, yet the United States continued to fund and support it in hopes to counter the communist threat. He notes: “Rightist regimes could receive, and did receive, support from the United States to an increasing extent”¹⁷ Backing dictators formed a common trend in United States foreign policy as the Cold War matured in the latter-half of the twentieth century. Financial interests often compelled this support for right-wing leaders. With regards to China, capital proved the driving force behind the continued support for Chiang Kai-shek’s exiled regime on Taiwan. Investment in China leading up to and during the Second World War was substantial; however the Communist Revolution seriously jeopardised these financial interests. Thus interest groups in the United States lobbied in support of the Kuomintang, the regime in which they had invested so heavily.

Still, support for Chiang’s regime proved in vain. According to Lundestad, neither of the Cold War superpowers significantly influenced the development nor the outcome of the Chinese civil war: “Chiang was already getting considerably more assistance from abroad than Mao was. The problems of the Kuomintang were internal. [...] If US support

¹⁶ Lundestad, *East, West, North, South*, 63.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 65.

to China was limited, Soviet support to Mao Tse-tung was even more limited.”¹⁸

Conversely, Lundestad likened Mao’s foreign policy to that of Tito’s in Yugoslavia:

“There were evident signs of independence in the ideology of the Chinese Communists.

Like Tito, Mao rose to power mostly on his own. Both of them had little to thank Moscow

for on that account.”¹⁹ For this reason, Lundestad concludes that the Communist victory

in the Chinese Civil War was largely the result of the country’s internal affairs, not

foreign influence. He writes:

Local factors led to the Communists’ victory in the civil war. Support for Mao increased rapidly. The majority of the peasant population had long been on his side, and corruption, incompetence and lack of willingness to institute reforms gradually limited Chiang’s support, even among the urban bourgeoisie.²⁰

The Chinese Communists transcended the Cold War sphere of influence to become

meaningful agents in global affairs. Even amidst a perceived East-West dichotomy there

were exceptions to the rule. The China Hands actually observed many of these “local

factors” on the ground; their findings will be examined in subsequent chapters.

Another seminal work in the field is Michael H. Hunt’s *Ideology and U.S. Foreign*

Policy. This is a critique of the American diplomatic tradition, which rebuts the

scholarship of both George F. Kennan and William Appleman Williams.²¹ Instead, Hunt

argues racial intolerance and ambivalence to social revolutions have driven American

policy makers to push an antagonistic foreign policy. Moreover, he believes the United

States perception of East Asia has been malleable: “Americans created for Orientals [...]

two distinctly different images: a positive one, appropriate to happy times when

¹⁸ Lundestad, *East, West, North, South*, 65.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 67.

²⁰ *Ibid*.

²¹ Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987),

paternalism and benevolence were in season, and a negative one, suited to those tense periods when abuse or aggrandisement became the order of the day.”²² Negative attitudes towards Chinese immigrants in the American West flourished in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Hunt cites growing “anti-coolie” sentiment in labour circles by the 1880s, and the open criticism of the Chinese race by the Cleveland administration.²³ The Open Door reversed this trend and by the time Wilson was in office the nation had developed a close and stable relationship to China.²⁴ Hunt’s most crucial assertion comes in his argument that American ambivalence to foreign revolutions explained its failed China policy:

Our inability even in the face of failure to modify our rigid, reflexive attitudes toward revolutions has tended to make a bad situation worse. This inflexibility had made Washington unresponsive to overtures from new revolutionary regimes eager to neutralize American hostility and thereby avoid a prolonged and costly confrontation. Confirmed in their suspicions of implacable American hostility, revolutionary leaders have turned to cultivate friends in the anti-American camp. Mao’s China, driven deeper into the Soviet embrace following the flat rejection of overtures in 1949, offers a particularly dramatic instance of this commonplace phenomenon that has proven strategically costly for the United States.²⁵

Evidently, Hunt believes that if it were not for American hostility towards foreign popular uprisings the United States might have had a chance to reconcile with the Mao regime. Instead, the Communists were perceived to be a dangerous adversary in the new Cold War dichotomy. Their anti-American rhetoric did not help matters and as a result Sino-American relations would be strained for next few decades.

Melvyn P. Leffler’s 1994 publication *The Specter of Communism* elaborates on the fact that American policy makers were thinking purely in terms of world order:

²² Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 69.

²³ *Ibid*, 70.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 108.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 175.

The men who made U.S. policy were anything but idealists. [...] They were concerned with configurations of power in the international system and how these configurations affected U.S. interests abroad and, more important, the American political economy at home... In Asia, the defeat of Japan bred new strife, reigniting the civil war in China and invigorating national independence movements in Southeast Asia.²⁶

Here, Leffler refers to this vague notion of “U.S. interests abroad,” but does not elaborate.

In fact, these interests are primarily those pertaining to capital. As noted earlier,

Americans had invested hundreds of millions of dollars in the Kuomintang regime. For the United States political elite, it was imperative to protect these financial interests from the Communist threat.

Niall Ferguson’s *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (2004) presents another interpretation of American imperialism. Ferguson cites anti-communist rhetoric of the Truman doctrine as proof of the United States imperialist policy. He writes:

What made [anti-communist rhetoric] so persuasive, though in many ways it was coincidental, was the catastrophic failure in any way to ‘contain’ communism in China, for by this time the Nationalist armies of Chiang Kai-shek had been driven right off the Chinese mainland by the Marxist Mao Zedong and his peasant army – the revolutionary heirs of postwar chaos, just as Lenin and the Bolsheviks had been thirty years before. Yet for all its defensive connotations, the American notion of containment, predicated though it was on the threat from another, malignant empire, was itself implicitly an imperial undertaking.²⁷

Just as Williams had posited decades earlier, this passage argues that containment, while disguised as a defensive *anti*-imperial policy, was in fact blatantly – ironically – imperialist. It would never gel with the Chinese Communist Party line, despite consistent China Hand advocacy.

²⁶ Melvyn P. Leffler, *The Specter of Communism: The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1917-1953* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 49.

²⁷ Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 80.

Walter L. Hixson's *The Myth of American Diplomacy* is an account of the American national identity as it relates to war, conquest and expansion. Like Hunt, Hixson notes how the political establishment in the 1880s dismissed Chinese culture as barbarous and of heathen nature.²⁸ However this perception of China changed in the twentieth century as the public warmed to the Christian Chiang Kai-shek and his English-speaking wife.²⁹ Hixson's discussion of the Communist Revolution and the China lobby's growth in power and influence will be fundamental to this study.

Heonik Kwon's *The Other Cold War* reflects a radical shift in Cold War historiography from the macro to the micro. His theory regarding the "decomposition of the Cold War" is outlined as follows:

The decomposition of the cold war thus involves a two-pronged shift of perspective regarding cold war history: from a geopolitical history to a social history, on the one hand, and from the exemplary central positioning of the cold war as imaginary or metaphoric war to a comparative positioning that privileges neither this peculiar history of war without warfare nor the peripheral 'unbridled reality' of state terror and civil war, on the other.³⁰

Third World countries experienced the Cold War far differently than the United States. The degree of violence and conflict was exponentially higher, particularly in Asian states. For Kwon internal political and social structures of Asian countries are essential to understanding the conflicts of the second half of the twentieth century. Kwon also raises the following important question about the Chinese Civil War: "Can we possibly understand the conflict in terms of a struggle of economic ideologies without taking into

²⁸ Walter L. Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 81.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 157-158.

³⁰ Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 9.

account the history of colonial threat and the humiliation it triggered?”³¹ Here, Kwon is concerned with the economic underpinnings of American imperialism and how it relates to the oppression of Third World working class populations. These will also be featured topics throughout this thesis.

Non-State Actors in China:

Simultaneous to the Nixon visit – perhaps as a result of it – Cold War scholarship became increasingly geared towards non-state actors. Jim Peck’s article from May and Thompson Jr.’s 1972 collection is one of the first to engage the role of figures like Jack Belden and Edgar Snow, both of whom reported from China during the Communist Revolution.³² In 1987 Paul Gordon Lauren’s compilation on the China Hands included articles on non-state actors, predominantly journalists. John W. Powell’s “The China Hands and the Press: A Journalist’s Retrospective” and Charles Hood’s “The China Hands’ Experience: Journalism and Diplomacy” are of particular interest to this study.

Published in 1982, Emily S. Rosenberg’s *Spreading the American Dream* chronicled the United States’ economic and cultural expansion from 1890 to 1945. While mainly focused on state actors, she offers many insights on business connections in China. The international consequences of what she describes as a “broad consensus of liberal-developmentalism (free enterprise, free trade, free flow, and developmental laws)”

³¹ Kwon, *The Other Cold War*, 50.

³² See Jim Peck, “America and the Chinese Revolution, 1942-1946: An Interpretation,” in *American-East Asian Relations: A Survey*, edited by Ernest R. May and James C. Thomson Jr. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 336.

are far-reaching.³³ In regards to China, Rosenberg cites the influence of American missionaries in the late-nineteenth century:

The first groups of missionaries felt that a thorough knowledge of the Gospel would bring success, and they entered China with little sensitivity toward its language or culture. Why learn the values of a heathen civilization that would shortly be transformed? Inevitably, there was no confusion of cultural symbols. Did a serpent represent evil, as it did to missionaries, or wisdom, as it did to the Chinese? Cultural chauvinism and racial superiority obstructed communication, and most Chinese considered missionaries eccentric rather than inspired.³⁴

Moreover, Rosenberg cites that the access to China's financial markets were a growing concern: "Both farmers and industrialists hoped to open Oriental markets, and yet, after China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, China seemed in imminent danger of being closed off to Americans."³⁵ American interests in China needed to be protected. This is the same ideology that justified the United States' occupation of the Philippines following the Spanish-American War. All things considered, Rosenberg concludes the following about the United States' China policy: "The principle of the Open Door – noncolonization and equal access – became the foundations of American economic diplomacy in the Far East."³⁶

Rosenberg also outlines the American philanthropic initiatives in China from the 1920s onwards.³⁷ For example the Rockefeller Foundation established women's colleges as well as the China Medical Board. The Carnegie Endowment and the China Foundation also participated in things such as scientific research and education policy. The non-state dimensions of American diplomacy are also evident in Rosenberg's analysis of the United China Relief initiative, a lobby group prevalent during the Second World War. She

³³ Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 13.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 31.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 43.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 54.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 120.

writes: “The United China Relief, for example, got Shirley Temple to make a radio appeal asking children to send nickels and dimes to the favorite movie stars, who would forward them to China; Thomas Lamont, John D. Rockefeller 3d, Thomas Watson of IBM, and other socialites attended [...] to raise money for United China Relief.”³⁸ The government’s association with Hollywood stars and business conglomerates foreshadows the pro-Chiang Kai-shek lobby that penetrated the American consciousness in the 1950s. All things considered Rosenberg provides a fruitful analysis of the business elements of the China Lobby.

Stephen R. MacKinnon’s *China Reporting* is a unique study of journalists on the ground in China. It relies extensively on records from the China War Reporting Conference, hosted by Arizona University in 1982. This particular gathering featured American correspondents who had reported from China during the Second World War. It is memorable in that it provides new insights on the role of non-state actors in the conflict. Peter Rand’s book from 1995 focuses primarily on the China Hands that were journalists, not government officials. Moreover he draws on new primary sources such as the private papers of Harold R. Isaacs, Edgar Snow and Theodore H. White. These China Hands played integral roles in the non-state actor realm of the Chinese Civil War.

Conclusion:

The aforementioned authors have provided breadth of evocative material on the Chinese Civil War. By no means is this a comprehensive list; the works selected are those deemed most relevant to this thesis. The American response to developments within China from the 1930s to the 1950s is complex and convoluted; however it can be

³⁸ Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream*, 220.

articulated through the breadth of primary and secondary source material available to the modern day historian. By analysing these various documents, this thesis demonstrates that Chiang was not the only option for the United States. As many journalists and government officials pointed out before the rise of the Communists, the Kuomintang resembled fascist regimes elsewhere in the world. Mao Zedong was once considered a viable alternative for the United States. Yet the anti-Communist hysteria that existed in the 1950s rendered this impossible and shattered any dreams of amicable Sino-American relations for an entire generation.

Non-state actors, predominantly American journalists, transcended the emerging bipolar Cold War discourse in their interpretation of the Communist Revolution in China. Most of these figures saw Mao Zedong as an honest reformer and Chiang Kai-shek as a corrupt dictator. In contrast State Department officials – the people making the decisions – saw it the other way around, thus putting the United States on the “losing” side of the Chinese Civil War. These underground, leftist journalists challenged the paradigm being promoted by the government in the early Cold War. Clearly, what was perceived on the ground did not always fit the bipolar narrative.

This thesis will probe the role of past experience and geography in creating mirrored narratives of the Chinese Civil War. For the China Hands, ideological sensibilities like anti-fascism and Marxism prove crucial to their interpretation of events. Their in-field reporting also reflected the role of locality and geography in one’s perception of international relations. The China Lobby, on the other hand, had different personal histories and vantage point. Its members were influenced by the conservatism of the Open Door, not leftist ideology. Moreover the fact that they were judging Chinese politics from abroad meant their interpretations deviated from those on the ground.

Instead, stateside views tended to be fervently pro-Chiang and anti-Mao because it ‘made sense’ given their political priorities and personal histories. Certain ideas – namely left-wing politics and the Open Door – became bigger than the Chinese Civil War or the Cold War. Individuals embraced alternative or traditional narratives depending on their background and location; China Hands and the China Lobby articulated different versions (and visions) of China based on personal sensibilities and local geographies.

Chapter Two – Red Stars, In China: The China Hands

Introduction:

Simply put, China Hands saw things on the ground that Washington policy makers and stateside power brokers did not. They felt – and often embraced – the prevailing anti-Chiang Kai-shek attitudes throughout China. Like increasing numbers of Chinese people from the era, these foreign correspondents gravitated towards the message and hope of Mao Zedong. Through the harsh lens of retrospection, they might look like Communist stooges or dupes. Yet, given their personal background and milieu, their responses made sense and felt right.

China Correspondents in the 1930s and 1940s

Political or ideological biases aside, foreign correspondents in China during the time of the Chinese Civil War sympathised with the plight of the Chinese people in a period of rampant civil strife and upheaval. This was partly a response to first-hand observation of decades of Chinese suffering.³⁹ It also reflected a long legacy of paternalism and orientalism in Sino-American relations. The missionary impulse and commercial connections from the late 1800s onwards created deep socio-cultural bonds between the two countries. By the 1930s, Americans had developed a particular fascination with Chinese culture and government officials had entrenched political stakes. Japan's invasion of Manchuria in September 1931 elevated China's place to new heights in the American public consciousness.

³⁹ See Diana Lary and Stephen MacKinnon, editors, *Scars of War: The Impact of Warfare on Modern China* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2001).

Earlier that same year an important novel was published by Pearl Buck titled *The Good Earth*. It topped the best sellers' list in 1931 and 1932 and had an unprecedented impact on American perceptions of Chinese culture and society.⁴⁰ Through her tales of Chinese agrarian families, Buck endeavoured to refute the notion that China was a backward, heathen civilisation. Her writing felt genuine and it sincerely portrayed the Chinese people as she saw them: simple, egalitarian farmers. Buck would become an advocate of a more rational and tolerant East-Asia policy. The Chinese people deserved American respect and friendship. Furthermore, Japan's invasion transformed Buck's work from popular interest to power politics.

Still, as the war in Asia deepened, Chinese politics remained shrouded in mystery to most Americans. Buck had told of the Chinese peasants, but not the power or potential of the most populous nation in the world. Edgar Snow sought to answer some of these important questions, including the extent of Communism within the Chinese system. While it was known that Kuomintang leader Chiang Kai-shek had been leading a highly publicised purge of leftist dissidents in 1927, many critics disputed his claims that the Communist threat had been completely eradicated. Snow's seminal *Red Star Over China* presented to the American public the first truly extensive and articulate account of Chinese Communism, as he perceived it during his travels.⁴¹ Snow was one of the select few journalists permitted to enter Communist Party territory at this time. He interviewed many high-ranking leaders in what Jerry Israel describes as Snow's "youthful romance

⁴⁰ Mike Meyer, "Pearl of the Orient," *The New York Times*, March 5, 2006, accessed November 26, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/05/books/review/05meyer.html>.

⁴¹ Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (New York: Random House, 1938), 6.

with a more unknown China.”⁴² Later Cold War pressure – or genuine change of heart – forced Snow to condemn Mao’s Communists. But in 1938, he saw promise. The Communist Party and its leadership represented a bright future of agrarian mobilisation and reform.

Edgar Snow distrusted Chiang Kai-shek’s political allegiances. His military support from Germany and Italy became suspect following the former party’s anti-communist pact with Japan, China’s sworn enemy. Snow writes: “German and Italian military advisers were training Chiang’s army and his air force to bomb Chinese Reds. Were they not also furnishing Japan with all the military information they had about China? Had Chiang Kai-shek not been informed in advance, in fact, of the German-Japan Pact, and approved of it? It was rumoured that he had.”⁴³ This association with the Axis powers was certainly suspect, compelling Snow to allude to Chiang’s fascist sympathies.

“Fascist in every quality but efficiency”: The China Correspondents and Chiang

Snow was not alone in this assumption. Reflecting the intellectual atmosphere of the era, many writers in the field expressed more radical views. Agnes Smedley, a self-proclaimed Communist sympathiser, travelled extensively throughout the Soviet Union before she arrived in China to report on its tense internal affairs. Her war reporting in the 1940s praised the accomplishments of the Communist Party and painted harsh picture of Chiang Kai-shek as a brutal dictator.⁴⁴ From a Cold War lens that assumes anything not communist must be democratic and just, Smedley’s description does not make sense.

⁴² Jerry Israel, “‘Mao’s Mr. America’: Edgar Snow’s Images of China,” *Pacific Historical Review* 47:1 (1978): 113.

⁴³ Snow, *Red Star Over China*, 401.

⁴⁴ Agnes Smedley, *Battle Hymn of China* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1943), 35.

However, her advocacy of communism mirrored a response to fascism around the world and paralleled the lives and opinions of many of her contemporaries. Another woman, Anna Louise Strong, provided sympathetic accounts of the uprisings in both Spain and China; *Spain in Arms* (1937) and *One Fifth of Mankind* (1938) represent prime examples of this antifascist literature. She continued her radical journalist work as one of the few Americans granted an interview with Mao Zedong in 1946.⁴⁵ Many American journalists in China harboured leftist political views which skewed their reporting. Yet, support of Mao and the communists by reporters like Smedley and Strong's also reflected real experiences and unique access on the ground.

For many of the journalists in the field, Kuomintang corruption and Chiang's despotism meant that fascism had taken hold in China. In the 1930s this reactionary political ideology had already gained considerable momentum throughout Europe and Japan. Therefore some of the more radical correspondents saw no issue with placing Chiang in the same camp as the fascist leaders of Europe or Japan. Antifascism was a popular trend throughout the United States at the time; that decade thousands of Americans travelled to Spain to fight Franco's corrupt and reckless regime. Likewise, many journalists with antifascist tendencies ended up in China reporting on Chiang Kai-shek's dictatorship. From their perspective, China was 'lost' to fascism long before the Soviet menace.

Some, like Agnes Smedley, had been on the ground in both Spain and China and saw overt similarities between both countries' struggles against fascism in the 1930s. Accordingly, she made a deliberate attempt to unite the two war efforts when she was

⁴⁵ See Anna Louise Strong, "Talk with Mao, August, 1946," *Selected Works of Mao-Tse Tung Vol. IV* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1969).

reporting in China. She circulated antifascist posters and propaganda until the Communist-controlled Northwest “was perhaps the only region in China that [echoed] with the struggle of the Spanish Republic.”⁴⁶ Regardless of whether or not she was successful in fostering a Sino-Spanish front to fight this tyrannical ideology, Smedley reflects the fervent antifascism that was common throughout the American Left in the 1930s.

Smedley even joined forces with Madame Sun Yat-sen (Sun Zhongshan / Sun Yixian), the widow of the former Chinese head of state, whom had become a vocal critic of Chiang Kai-shek since his rise to power.⁴⁷ Together these women took an activist role, utilising the left-wing press in the United States to create an anti-Chiang front. Peter Rand writes:

These anti-Chiang Kai-shek partisans of Madame Sun had begun to make themselves heard, both in Shanghai and the radical American press of the Depression, in publications like the *New Masses*, *The Nation* and *The New Republic*. Much of this new publicity was the product of the collaboration between Madame Sun and Agnes Smedley.⁴⁸

Madame Sun was “engaged in a struggle against Fascism in China in the person of Chiang Kai-shek. [...] Through the agency of a few chosen journalists, Madame Sun place her cause in the minds of Western readers, in China and internationally.”⁴⁹ Far from the fringe, many of the most prominent China Hands saw through Chiang’s veneer. The significance of non-state actors – both American and Chinese – is thus evident in the work of Madame Sun and Agnes Smedley.

⁴⁶ Smedley, *Battle Hymn of China*, 172.

⁴⁷ Peter Rand, *China Hands: The Adventures and Ordeals of the American Journalists Who Joined Forces with the Great Chinese Revolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 85.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 100.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 101.

These correspondents saw Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang government as inept – even fascist – rather than democratic as later Cold Warriors painted it. They sympathised with the Chinese people, but derided its governing party. In sum, China Hands viewed the corrupt and authoritarian regime as akin to Mussolini's Italy, Franco's Spain, or Hitler's Germany. This assessment grew out of political sympathy for Marxist doctrine and excitement about the real reforms seen on the ground. Thus the lives and work of many China Hands remained anti-fascist and Marxist even as the global scene changed. Accordingly, these non-state actors were able to transcend the bipolar narrative that eventually engulfed political discourse in the United States.

Chiang's Kai-shek's purge of leftist dissidents infuriated American journalists stationed in China during the 1930s.⁵⁰ Given their own leftist views, many of these correspondents tended to sympathise with the workers, whom Chiang exploited throughout this ordeal. In *Red Star Over China*, Edgar Snow explained: "Chiang Kai-shek made use of the workers to secure his victory [...] But immediately afterwards they were suppressed in one of the most demoralising blood-baths in history, with the sanctification of the foreign powers and financial help of foreign capitalists."⁵¹ Snow's passage demonstrates resentment not only towards Chiang's reckless regime, but also, it seems, towards the United States and other Western democracies who failed to intervene or stop Kuomintang repression.

While stationed in China, Harold Isaacs founded a radical newspaper called *The China Forum*. The paper was critical of Chiang's regime and relied on funds from the Chinese Communist Party. Not surprisingly, it was censored after only a few years of

⁵⁰ Ironically, Stalin's purges around the same time turned many "Russia Hands" staunchly anti-communist.

⁵¹ Snow, *Red Star Over China*, 440.

publication in the early 1930s. Nevertheless its existence alone reflected the on the ground experience of the China correspondents. In an article published following *The China Forum*'s demise, Isaacs lamented the magazine's "open struggle against the common enemy – against the Kuo Min Tang and the imperialists."⁵² Indeed, the periodical was a genuine social activist force. According to Rand:

The China Forum was born to expose the murky facts of Shanghai life and political concerns even further afield under the bright glare of publicity. Isaacs specialized in a kind of tough-guy tabloid prose that combined effectively with social issues; he had the sound of a left-wing New York labor organizer with a college education. [...] Isaacs also relied on anonymous underground Communists or Communist sympathizers for news items.⁵³

The leftist politics of *The China Forum* were obvious. One issue's cover featured "a Chinese officer's sinister, bony face partly concealed by the brim of a stylishly high-crowned officer's cap of the SS kind and, in the foreground, a flow of human skulls." Rand suggests that it was probably "a depiction of Chiang Kai-shek,"⁵⁴ reflecting the leader's reputation as a fascist.

Ultimately the question remains of whether or not Chiang Kai-shek was actually a fascist. Scholars have often weighed in on the subject. In the immediate aftermath of the Communist Revolution, C.P. Fitzgerald wrote that throughout the conflict "the Chinese people groaned under a regime Fascist in every quality except efficiency."⁵⁵ Others have been more hesitant to portray the Kuomintang as outright fascists. Rather the regime is framed as pseudo-fascist, or some other kind of hybrid ideology. For example, Odd Arne Westad writes: "The Generalissimo wanted to set up a new type of political organisation

⁵² Harold Isaacs, "I Break with the Chinese Stalinists (May 1934)," *New International*, Vol.1 No.3, September-October 1934, pp. 76-78. <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/isaacs/1934/05/break.htm>.

⁵³ Rand, *China Hands*, 103.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 112. Adolph Dehn, contributing editor of the *New Masses*, drew the picture.

⁵⁵ C. P. Fitzgerald, *Revolution in China* (London: The Cresset Press, 1952), 103.

of Chinese society, patterned to some extent on the Western ideologies of Fascism and Stalinism, with one political leader, a powerful, select elite, and a mass-party that could carry out the leader's commands in making the country rich and strong."⁵⁶ Westad's consensus here is that the Kuomintang formed a hybrid, semi-fascist government.

Jay Taylor's biography of Chiang Kai-shek, on the other hand, rejects any association between the Generalissimo and fascism. He offers the following interpretation:

The Prussian ideal intrigued Chiang; long before he ever heard of Hitler, he knew from his reading and his no-nonsense German advisers that Germany was disciplined and orderly. He especially admired the way that Germany, Japan and Turkey had in recent years raised their respective "national spirits." [...] But this affinity for German achievements was not a sign of craven Nazism. Unlike the Japanese, Chiang showed no interest in duplicating the key aspects of Nazi ideology: racial supremacy, territorial expansion, and hemispheric if not world conquest. In his diary he never mentioned, much less welcomed, any of the milestones of the rise of fascism in Germany [...] Chiang was fascist in neither ends nor means.⁵⁷

Ultimately, Taylor concludes the following: "Chiang could be heartless and sometimes ruthless, but he lacked the pathological megalomania and the absolutist ideology of a totalitarian dictator."⁵⁸

Taylor's biography of Chiang Kai-shek has been written with years of hindsight and access to new sources unavailable to the journalists and writers on the ground in China. Maybe Chiang was not truly a fascist; maybe he was not as principled as the better-known exemplars of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, these American journalists and writers saw Chiang in the same vein as other fascist world leaders. From

⁵⁶ Odd Arne Westad, *Decisive Encounters: The Chinese Civil War, 1946-1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 43.

⁵⁷ Jay Taylor, *The Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-shek and the Struggle for Modern China* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 101.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 103.

their perspective, the Kuomintang was a corrupt and repressive government. Unlike Taylor, these non-state actors were not worried about the intricacies of what makes a pure fascist state. They just felt compelled to speak out against these kinds of authoritarian regimes. One could also debate whether or not Franco was truly fascist – regardless, the thousands of Americans that flocked to Spain to fight fascism still reflect the anti-fascist sentiment of many foreign correspondents from the era.⁵⁹

Lloyd E. Eastman’s analysis of fascism in China is likely closer to the truth. He downplays the rigid ideological foundations of Chinese fascism:

It is worth reiterating that many Chinese in the 1930s did not view fascism as pernicious or retrogressive. On the contrary, they felt it to be the most advanced and efficient of political systems. Parliamentary government had been tried repeatedly in China since 1912, and with obviously tragic consequences. Moreover, it seemed that, throughout the world, democracy and laissez-faire-ism were being rejected in favour of one-man or one-party dictatorships. Fascism, therefore, appeared to be both a progressive doctrine and one that was suited to China's particular circumstances.⁶⁰

The pervasiveness of “progressive” fascism in the 1930s is what really troubled the foreign correspondents. As tension in China increased towards the end of the decade, journalists started seeing the conflict in international terms. As Rand writes: “It was an interim time, between the Spanish Civil War and the invasion of Poland by Hitler, when the Yangtze Valley was the only front in the world where the war against fascism was being actively fought.”⁶¹ To them, fascism was not an efficient method of governing China, nor any state for that matter. It was a widespread, global phenomenon that needed

⁵⁹ See Paul Preston, *We Saw Spain Die: Foreign Correspondents in the Spanish Civil War* (London: Constable & Robinson, 2008).

⁶⁰ Lloyd E. Eastman, “Fascism in Kuomintang China: The Blue Shirts.” *The China Quarterly* 49:1 (1972): 3.

⁶¹ Rand, *China Hands*, 186. This passage refers specifically to the year of 1938.

to be addressed, thus explaining the common choice amongst non-state actors to reject the legitimacy of Chiang's rule and lend their support to Mao's Communists.

On the other hand, Theodore H. White and Annalee Jacoby felt that the Chiang Kai-shek's regime fell short of fascism. They explain that while many correspondents

declared that China had no government but anarchy or a coalition of war lords [...] or that this was stark Fascism. All these simple explanations were wrong. The easiest way to understand China was to decide first that the government was only a false front for the Kuomintang, whose politics and cleavages were the main determinants of decision, and that behind the party was a personal despotism, the oldest form of rule known to mankind.⁶²

The Kuomintang government was certainly autocratic and hostile, yet White and Jacoby believed it was something less advanced than fascism. Instead they portrayed Chiang as a backward, reactionary leader akin to a feudal warlord. This is perhaps an even more unflattering label than a fascist, given its connotations of primitiveness and barbarism.

Still, non-radical China Hands knew Chiang Kai-shek's regime was corrupt and heavy-handed. Seymour Topping, an establishment journalist and correspondent with the *New York Times*, had "close acquaintance with the Nationalist officials," allowing him to witness firsthand "the extent to which they were infected with corruption."⁶³ The incompetence of the Kuomintang became notorious amongst the foreign correspondents. In *Thunder Out of China*, Theodore H. White and Annalee Jacoby outlined the nature of its governance:

The new Kuomintang government was a dictatorship. It glossed itself with the phrases of Sun Yat-sen and claimed that it was the "trustee" of the people, who were in a state of "political tutelage". Its secret police were ubiquitous, while its censorship closed down like a vacuum pack over the Chinese press and Chinese universities. It held elections nowhere, for its

⁶² Theodore H. White and Annalee Jacoby, *Thunder Out of China* (New York: William Sloane Associates, Inc., 1946), 99.

⁶³ Seymour Topping, "Assignment: China - The Chinese Civil War," *USC US-China Institute* video 14:30, <http://china.usc.edu/assignment-china-chinese-civil-war>.

conception of strengthening China was to strengthen itself, and it governed by fiat.⁶⁴

No realm of public life was immune; whether it was in politics or the press or the education system, the fraudulent regime of the Kuomintang was evident to White, Jacoby and others. Reporting from the ground, these anti-Chiang voices cast doubt on the United States government's chosen ally.

“A Rather Lincolnesque Figure”: China Correspondents and Mao

On the whole, these foreign correspondents saw Mao Zedong in a far more positive light than Chiang Kai-shek. Some saw the Communists as genuine revolutionaries, others as liberal democrats; but their popularity amongst the peasantry was unquestioned. This leadership impressed the expatriate journalists. According to Seymour Topping: “There was a great deal of admiration among the correspondents for the Communists. [...] The general feeling at that point was that we were looking at the Chinese Communist forces essentially as reformers.”⁶⁵ For his wife, Audrey Topping, supporting the Communists felt like a natural response to the deep suffering experienced by Chinese people. “Anybody that was well informed in Nanking at the time realised that the Communist victory was inevitable,” she claims. “They were going to win. The diplomats and the Nationalists [were having] great parties every night, [but] people were starving in the streets.”⁶⁶ Kuomintang negligence had disastrous effects on the poor people of China. This turned many Western journalists towards the Communists, who

⁶⁴ White and Jacoby, *Thunder Out of China*, 41.

⁶⁵ Seymour Topping, “Assignment: China - The Chinese Civil War,” *USC US-China Institute* video 14:30, <http://china.usc.edu/assignment-china-chinese-civil-war>.

⁶⁶ Audrey Topping, “Assignment: China - The Chinese Civil War,” *USC US-China Institute* video 15:10, <http://china.usc.edu/assignment-china-chinese-civil-war>.

they figured were better suited to remedy China's grief and inequality. Though later dismissed during the Cold War as naïve Communist Party dupes, China Hand sympathy for Mao grew out of actual observation in the field.

John Roderick, a reporter with the Associated Press, observed the stark “contrast of life” between the rich and poor living in Shanghai. He was particularly stirred witnessing “the poor of China drinking water from the muddy canals and living their lives out in extreme poverty.”⁶⁷ Since the Kuomintang policies were so detrimental to the peasantry, journalists like Roderick lent their support to the Communists instead. “I admired the fact that they were trying to do something for the poor Chinese,” he later remarked.⁶⁸ Indeed, it was easy for many of these foreign correspondents to sympathise with the Communists in light of the suffering peasantry. White and Jacoby were among those who linked the revolutionaries' cause with the rural population: “They asked: For whose benefit should China be reorganised? They answered: For the Chinese peasant himself.”⁶⁹ The close association between the suffering rural population and the Communist cause is apparent. War caused sympathy for Chinese people but not its leaders. Instead, the Kuomintang lost face and the Communists drew admirers by working to alleviate citizen suffering.

Edgar Snow was enthralled upon meeting Communist leader Mao Zedong. He was reminded of great American leaders of the past; the Chinese revolutionary was described as “a rather Lincolnesque figure.” The leader enchanted Snow so much that he felt he

⁶⁷ John Roderick, “Assignment: China - The Chinese Civil War,” *USC US-China Institute* video, <http://china.usc.edu/assignment-china-chinese-civil-war>.

⁶⁸ David Briscoe, “John Roderick; AP Correspondent Captured a Changing China,” *Washington Post*, March 13, 2008, accessed February 14, 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/03/12/AR2008031204172_2.html.

⁶⁹ White and Jacoby, *Thunder Out of China*, 40.

“could write a book on Mao Tse-tung alone.”⁷⁰ Moreover, he came to view the Chinese Communists as genuine reformers with pure ideological intentions. Snow described the movement’s dedication to Marxism as follows:

These phenomena reflected a general disposition on the part of the Reds to make necessary changes in form and nomenclature, while retaining the essential content of their doctrine and programme, and their autonomous existence. [...] Marxism, and the basic tenets of social revolution, it was quite clear, they would never give up. Every new step taken, every change made, was examined, debated, decided, and integrated in terms of Marxism – and the proletarian revolution, which the Communists did not abandon as their ultimate purpose.⁷¹

Snow also emphasised the Communists’ support amongst the peasantry. Mao Zedong and his followers had a strong support network in the rural farming community: “By carrying out the land revolution the Reds were able to satisfy the demands of a substantial peasant following, take the leadership of part of rural China, and even build several powerful bases on an almost purely agrarian economy.”⁷² According to Kenneth E. Shewmaker’s account of the China Hands, Edgar Snow “was the most articulate and staunch advocate of the thesis that the Chinese Communists were Marxist revolutionaries aspiring to the attainment of absolute political power.”⁷³ Given the aforementioned quotations from *Red Star Over China*, this analysis holds weight. All things considered, Edgar Snow’s work revered the Chinese Communists and their Marxist cause. This was not because of deep-seated ideology, but rather a profound empathy for the plight of the Chinese people.

Harrison Forman was another foreign correspondent that embraced the Communists during his time spent in China. He interviewed many high-ranking party officials and documented the conditions of Communist-controlled territory, an entity still largely

⁷⁰ Snow, *Red Star Over China*, 66.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 433.

⁷² *Ibid*, 442.

⁷³ Kenneth E. Shewmaker, “The Agrarian Reformer Myth,” *The China Quarterly* 34:2 (1968): 76.

unknown to the American public. Forman kept a series of diaries throughout his trips throughout China.⁷⁴ Unlike Snow, he rejected the notion that Chinese Communists were pure Marxists. Moreover in *Report From Red China* he explained how Mao and his followers were not Marxist-Leninists in the true “Russian definition of the term.”⁷⁵ More than anything else, he considered CCP ideology to be egalitarian and democratic. Harrison Forman’s analysis presented the Chinese Communists first and foremost as a reform movement. This was a nuance not allowed by Washington power politics; it was predicated on the local moods and conditions in China.

Harrison Forman also praised the efficiency of the Chinese Communists against their fascist Japanese foe. Like many of his contemporaries, he was focused on the war ongoing rather than the war to come. As it dragged on, it became clear that the Communists represented the group best suited to fight Japanese aggression. Accordingly, Forman’s work contributed to the pro-Communist sentiment that flourished amongst the American Left during the war. In the context of the Cold War – and Mao’s increasingly autocratic regime – Forman’s evaluation of the revolutionaries seemed misguided. But what he saw and felt on the ground in China told him otherwise.⁷⁶

Not all foreign correspondents agreed with this appraisal of the Chinese Communists. Harold Isaacs criticised the glorified interpretation found within *Red Star Over China*. Interestingly, from his radical perspective Mao Zedong was not communist enough; he had adopted an impure and perverted form of Marxism. In 1941, Isaacs

⁷⁴ Harrison Forman, “Travel Diaries and Scrapbooks of Harrison Forman 1932-1973,” *University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee*, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://collections.lib.uwm.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/forman>.

⁷⁵ Harrison Forman, *Report From Red China* (New York: Henry Holt, 1945), 177.

⁷⁶ Shewmaker, “The Agrarian Reformer Myth,” 80.

published an article in the *Fourth International* condemning Edgar Snow's support of Chinese 'Stalinism':

Among the many correspondents reporting Far Eastern affairs for the American public, Edgar Snow occupies a special position. He is probably one of the ablest propagandists for Stalinism who still commands a general hearing. [...] Snow turns telling journalistic guns on Chiang Kai-shek, the Kuomintang, Japan, the United States, and Britain. Only Stalin, the Soviet Union and the Chinese Stalinists are spared.⁷⁷

Contrary to Snow, Harold Isaacs denied that Mao and his followers were true Marxists. Instead he thought the Chinese Communists had adopted the same tyrannical ideology as Stalin. In 1972 – following Nixon's visit to China – Isaacs would elaborate on his impression Snow's work:

Red Star Over China gave a highly laudatory account of the Chinese Communists, their program, their methods, and their practices. [...] Snow was greatly struck by the contrast between the Communists in their hinterland refuge and the Kuomintang. When Snow came upon them, the Communists were still wholly confined to rural areas, were engaged in a major shift to milder and reformist policies, and had developed to a fine point their great skill in enlisting the mass of peasants in their cause. [...] Snow faithfully presented the full party line and made it quite plain that the aim remained full conquest of Communist power, but it is still probably fair to locate in his ardent pages the birthplace of the eventful idea that the Chinese Communists, unlike any other Communists anywhere else, were nothing but "agrarian reformers."⁷⁸

Though critical of Snow's interpretation of the situation in China, Isaacs still provides an accurate account of the real conditions on the ground.

Still, Edgar Snow's impact on the collective consciousness of the United States is undeniable. His writing particularly resonated with the American Left before the rise of anti-communism:

⁷⁷ Harold Isaacs (George Stern), "An Apologist For Chinese Stalinism" *Fourth International*, vol.2 No.6, July 1941, pp. 190-191. <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/isaacs/1941/07/edgarsnow.htm>. This was the 'Trotskyist' journal of the U.S. Socialist Workers Party.

⁷⁸ Harold Isaacs, *Images of Asia* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 163.

Read mainly by liberal intellectuals, [*Red Star Over China*] placed the Chinese Communists in the ranks of Good Causes, to the support of which so many intellectuals were drawn until the early 1950s. The cumulative effect of Snow's work was to contribute to an intellectual atmosphere that would profoundly affect the activities and development of the community of China scholars in the years ahead; but in the late 1930s, it filled a virtual void of impressions concerning the Chinese Communists. Lines of ideological partisanship were not yet clearly drawn.⁷⁹

Ben L. Martin does a spectacular job of articulating the ideological context in which foreign correspondents existed during the Chinese Civil War. Though not as rigid and partisan as they would become by the 1950s, two distinct camps were becoming clear in the 1930s. Conservative supporters of Chiang's regime "tended to perceive its flaws in circumstantial terms, as functions of the exigencies of war and the problematic nature of Westernization." Their views differed from the liberal camp, which relentlessly criticised the Kuomintang. As Martin explains, the liberals were also exponentially more optimistic about the Communists' future in China:

Liberal scholars, journalists, and diplomats, however, perceived an epochal shift in the process of modernization, in which the mantle of revolutionary leadership was passing from one elite to another. As a result, liberals tended to accord the Chinese Communists a legitimate place in Chinese historical processes and not to regard them simply as alien agents. To be sure, some liberals thought it possible that the Nationalist government could reform itself, and delay or reverse the process of popular and historical repudiation which they perceived; but a thread of pessimism ran through their analyses in this respect, especially those based most explicitly on class analysis. And the decay of the Nationalists was contrasted with the efficiency, incorruptibility, patriotism, and popularity of the Chinese Communists fighting the Japanese and mobilizing the peasantry in North China.⁸⁰

Leftist journalists saw a stark contrast between these opposing forces in Chinese politics. Naturally, they sided with the Communists – the group they perceived to be most in tune

⁷⁹ Ben L. Martin, "The New "Old China Hands": Shaping a Specialty," *Asian Affairs* 3:2 (1975): 116.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 117.

with the working class Chinese. For the China Hands, it felt like an easy choice mixing perception on the ground with political sensibilities.

Ultimately, Martin believes “it was the novelists, journalists, travelers, and writers of assorted descriptions who were mainly responsible for the treatment of China for mass consumption.”⁸¹ Indeed, Snow initiated a literary movement that came to host a number of influential authors, many of whom were discussed throughout this chapter. But if this is the case – that novelists, journalists and writers were the ones responsible for articulating China to the masses – then why did the United States government see Chinese communism as a “loss”? How did they fail to prevent the “loss of China” (i.e. predict and support the Communists’ eventual victory)? Why was there continued support for Chiang Kai-shek despite the heavy criticism? Why were diplomatic relations unreachable between and Communist China and the United States? Answers to these questions lie in the emergence, consolidation and predominance of the anti-communist China Lobby, as well as its ability to censor and blacklist the China Hands. Stark Cold War politics came to overshadow ground-level observation.

Conclusion:

The truth is there were no ‘good,’ ‘right’ or ‘easy’ choices for the China Hands. The Chinese Communists were volatile and later proved to be extremely repressive. At the same time, the Kuomintang was corrupt, autocratic and ineffective. Both options, viewed in these terms, were unappealing; either one would be detrimental to the Chinese people as a whole. Which one was supported depended largely on the advocate’s personal background and locality. This explains on-the-ground endorsement of the Communists

⁸¹ Martin, “The New Old China Hands,” 115.

and stateside support of the Kuomintang. Ultimately, the Chinese Civil War presented American journalists with an impossible choice that many in the era got wrong, leading to decades of backlash and victimising from the China Lobby.

Chapter Three – “Anything But Idealists”: The China Lobby

Introduction:

The results of the China Hands’ ground-level observations largely fell by the wayside once the anti-Communist pathos of the Cold War entrenched in the United States. In the 1950s, the demands of bipolar geopolitics rendered any sympathy for Mao Zedong treasonous or, at the very least, antithetical. The Cold War forced non-state actors out as China experts – geographically and politically – in favour of state actors or associates such as conservative diplomats and power brokers in Washington. The ‘China Lobby’, as it became known, told a very different story and offered its own set of China policies. Their views and influence change public perception of the Chinese Civil War into a struggle between Chiang as the democratic hero and Mao as the communist villain. The dissident opinions voiced by the China Hands in the 1930s and 1940s were suddenly deemed un-American. In essence, the local knowledge obtained by the China Hands’ was abandoned for the global approach of the China Lobby.

Though predominantly a government-driven endeavour, non-state actors contributed to the China Lobby and the new direction in policy. Politicians were not the only ones who condemned liberal journalists; media conglomerates and right wing pundits also contributed to the anti-Communist rhetoric. The China Hands, who had expressed pro-Mao sentiments, became targets for more conservative colleagues ‘back home’. Bipolar geopolitics came to the fore because of government policy, public sentiment and media collaboration. Before the Cold War ever began, the stateside China Lobby undercut and censored China Hand reporters in the field.

The American Media and Chiang:

The origins of the China Lobby, like the China Hands, can be traced back to the ‘Open Door’ policy of the nineteenth century. According to United States foreign relations scholar Walter Hixson: “With the U.S. frontier having closed, China offered a romanticized vision and a site for manifesting U.S. prestige and visions of providential expansion. [...] The China lobby broadened public support for Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and his English-speaking wife, invariably described as being beautiful and charming during her frequent U.S. visits.”⁸² Indeed, by the Second World War a dominant pro-Chiang Kai-shek faction had coalesced in American society. Through various missionary and business networks the China Lobby in Washington had become deeply invested in the Kuomintang cause.

A central figure of the China Lobby was the owner and editor of *Time* magazine, Henry Luce. Since his father was a missionary, Luce had grown up in China and developed a particular fascination with the country. Rand suggests *Time* magazine’s “personal stake in China” was the result of Henry Luce being the offspring of a China missionary.⁸³ Astarita agrees that Luce’s missionary background ingrained in him “the idea that only thanks to the help of US, China could become a modern, Christian and democratic country.”⁸⁴ Luce’s vision for China was also based on capitalist expansion. His famous essay titled “The American Century” captured this ethos as it related to Asia:

The vision of America [...] as the dynamic leader of world trade, has within it the possibilities of such enormous human progress as to stagger the imagination. Let us not be staggered by it. Let us rise to its tremendous possibilities. Our thinking of world trade today is on ridiculously small

⁸² Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*, 157.

⁸³ Rand, *China Hands*, 197.

⁸⁴ Claudia Astarita, “The Evolution of the Image of China in the United States during the Cold War,” *China Report* 45:1 (2009): 23.

terms. For example, we think of Asia as being worth only a few hundred millions a year to us. Actually, in the decades to come Asia will be worth to us exactly zero – or else it will be worth to us four, five, ten billions of dollars a year. And the latter are the terms we must think in, or else confess a pitiful impotence.⁸⁵

Luce evidently saw great potential in China for American expansion. For this reason he embodied the spirit of the Open Door. This free market, Christian democratic sensibility was destined to reject communism in China.

In order to make this ambitious vision for foreign expansion a reality, Luce allied *Time* magazine with Chiang Kai-shek's camp in China. Stephen P. MacKinnon explains: "in Chungking he extended his idolatry of nation to embrace also the one—or the part of one—presided over by the Christian Chiang Kai-shek and the Christian Soong Mei-ling, Chiang's wife."⁸⁶ Chiang made sense to Luce. The Chinese leader had support from the country's business elite and his wife's Christianity linked Chiang to the missionary world; Luce could relate to both of these demographics. Moreover, even unsympathetic journalists on the ground who reviled Kuomintang excess described Chiang himself as an austere man who "lived frugally by American standards."⁸⁷ Indeed, the Open Door legacy between the two countries was clear: "Western businessmen created Chinese businessmen in their likeness."⁸⁸ In sum, Chiang genuinely believed that he was the benevolent leader that would bring democracy to China.⁸⁹ Since Henry Luce felt the exact same way about the Chinese statesmen, he endorsed the Kuomintang cause wholeheartedly, especially once Mao's communism threatened to undercut China's capitalist and Christian potential.

⁸⁵ Henry Luce, "The American Century," *Life Magazine*, February 17, 1941, in *Diplomatic History* 23:2 (1999): 170.

⁸⁶ Stephen P. MacKinnon and Oris Friesen, *China Reporting: An Oral History of American Journalism in the 1930s and 1940s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 18.

⁸⁷ White and Jacoby, *Thunder Out of China*, 122.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 35.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 131.

Thus, Luce derided Mao Zedong's CCP as fervently as he praised Chiang Kai-shek's regime. *Time* magazine's coverage of Maoist China was consistently biased against the revolutionaries. Claudia Astarita's investigation of the United States media's portrayal of China concludes the following:

From the early 1950s, the only picture of China presented to American readers was strongly linked to the image of the communist nightmare. Because of the lack of direct connections between the two countries, at the beginning of the Cold War, the PRC had always been identified as an aggressive and arrogant nation. Although it is human to exaggerate a threat that cannot be truly understood, in the case of China, it is evident that the media played a significant role in further strengthening its negative image.⁹⁰

Luce stood at the forefront of a movement to demonise the Chinese Communist threat. As the Chinese Civil War progressed, he "began to make his publications [...] vehicles for his anti-Communism. In religious wars, issues are always black and white. To Luce, Godless Communism was evil, Christian capitalism was good."⁹¹ Luce's anti-Communism was therefore deeply intertwined with his missionary impulse. The China Lobby provided the China Hands with a stable adversary in the fight for American public opinion, but they had geopolitical forces on their side.

Accordingly, Henry Luce's anti-Communism became a significant roadblock for China Hands – and left-leaning *Time* employees – Theodore White and Annalee Jacoby. On the ground in war-torn China, they perceived errors in Luce's judgment and the China Lobby's belief system. For them, Luce and his associates were deluded by the notion that Chiang Kai-shek was a moderate leader. Jacoby would later explain: "It was impossible to convince people that the Communists were going to win the war. There wasn't any feeling in this country that there was anything wrong with the Kuomintang government,

⁹⁰ Astarita, "The Evolution of the Image of China," 31.

⁹¹ Rand, *China Hands*, 226.

that they were not honest Christian democrats, that they were not beloved by their people and would win a well-deserved triumph with no trouble at all.”⁹² From Jacoby’s perspective, Chiang’s regime was incompetent and destined to fail. Henry Luce and the China Lobby simply could not see outside their Christian democratic box.

Another influential newspaper during the Chinese Civil War was the *China Weekly Review*. It was owned and edited by John B. Powell, a staunch supporter of the Kuomintang government. Although he had strong China Lobby ties,⁹³ Powell also believed in freedom of speech. For this reason the *China Weekly Review* included anti-fascist, pro-Communist rhetoric written by China Hands like Agnes Smedley. According to Peter Rand’s study:

Agnes Smedley antagonized not only the die-hards and the official American community in Shanghai, but also others less morally indignant than she was among her colleagues. She steered clear of other journalists, with the notable exception of those who worked at the *China Weekly Review*. [...] ‘Since [J. B. Powell] disliked the Communists and believed in the Kuomintang, we often disagreed,’ she wrote, ‘but he was one American democrat who always defended my right to think and write as I wished.’⁹⁴

The China Lobby was not a homogeneously repressive. Sometimes dissent was permitted by pro-Chiang Kai-shek figures. However, individuals like Powell were few and far between. For the most part, anti-Chiang writers were censored in an effort to sway public opinion against the Communists. This process intensified especially as the Cold War deepened.

⁹² Annalee Jacoby, “Assignment: China - The Chinese Civil War,” *USC US-China Institute* video 12:00, <http://china.usc.edu/assignment-china-chinese-civil-war>.

⁹³ Ross Y. Koen, *The China Lobby in American Politics* (New York: Octagon Books, 1974), 58.

⁹⁴ Rand, *China Hands*, 85.

Anti-Communism on the Home Front: Censoring the China Hands

Time became notorious for its censorship throughout the Chinese Civil War. This behaviour pandered to the China Lobby in Washington and generated significant public disapproval for the Communists. The magazine was able to do so via Henry Luce's autocratic method of governance. Rand explains: "The Luce system of journalism operated like an intelligence bureau [...] In addition to the clever manipulation of the photographic image as symbolic statement, Luce's achievement was the use to which he put facts in his publications so that they represented what he wanted them to. Luce introduced a new and sophisticated sleight-of-hand to the practice of "objective" journalism."⁹⁵ Reports from China were always subject to change once they arrived at the editorial offices back in the United States. For this reason, "People who worked at *Time* lived in terror of Henry Luce."⁹⁶ Many China Hands were frequently censored for their contradictory claims on the nature of the Chinese Civil War.

Back in the United States, Luce disciple and *Time* editor Whittaker Chambers carried out the censorship campaign. Annalee Jacoby recalls a particular occasion when this notorious figure rewrote one of her interviews with Chiang Kai-shek:

I had an interview with Chiang Kai-shek once... The next week came *Time* magazine with several pages of an interview with questions I did not ask and with answers Chiang Kai-shek did not give. Massively anti-communist diatribe, anti-communist stories which were not true. I would never have asked those questions. And Chiang Kai-shek, in spite of his hatred of communists, would never have given those answers. Whittaker Chambers had sat in New York and made up dialogue to put in the mouth of the head of one of our allies.⁹⁷

This brazen distortion of facts upset Jacoby to the point of hopelessness. She would

⁹⁵ Rand, *China Hands*, 200-201.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 214.

⁹⁷ Annalee Jacoby, "Assignment: China - The Chinese Civil War," *USC US-China Institute* video 12:30, <http://china.usc.edu/assignment-china-chinese-civil-war>.

express frustration with Luce and Chambers to her colleague Theodore White: “they’re so deep in this insane Russo-phobia that no logic is possible, no fact will be believed, your honesty won’t be trusted.”⁹⁸ Anti-Communism pervaded the conservative media elite in the United States. The left leaning journalists employed in the field, however, did not share the same worldview.

Given its pro-Chiang Kai-shek agenda, *Time* magazine avoided publishing controversial material that exposed the Kuomintang’s corruption. For example, when a report on a battle near Shanghai produced photographs of “Nationalist troops who had decapitated the Communist commander and mounted his severed head on a wall,”⁹⁹ the editors made sure the story was never published. The information conveyed to the American public had to align with Luce’s own philosophy. This anecdote demonstrates the extent Henry Luce influenced the message being conveyed to the American public.

Luce and Chambers’ censorship during the Chinese Civil War foreshadowed the type of over-zealous anti-Communism that dominated American political discourse in the 1950s. Following the CCP victory, a steady flow of literature disseminated the opinion that the American left had “lost” China. These publications included right wing writers like John T. Flynn, who targeted the China Hands journalists. His 1951 work *While You Slept: Our Tragedy in Asia and Who Made It* took issue with the “pro-Communist” literature of Forman, Snow, Smedley, Strong, White and Jacoby, and many others. In his view, their books “gave the weight of their evidence and special pleading to the Chinese

⁹⁸ Annalee Jacoby quoted in Rand, *China Hands*, 255.

⁹⁹ Narrator, “Assignment: China - The Chinese Civil War,” *USC US-China Institute* video 14:00, <http://china.usc.edu/assignment-china-chinese-civil-war>.

Communists.”¹⁰⁰ Moreover, he highlighted the following lies perpetrated by the China

Hands:

4. That the Nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek was corrupt, futile, fascist-dominated by industrialists, bankers and landlords and that Chiang was their willing tool.

5. That the so-called Chinese Communists were not really Communists, but agrarian reformers, like our old-fashioned progressives or farmer-laborites.¹⁰¹

As the previous chapter revealed, there was some element of truth in these two key ideas. Still, Flynn’s analysis was deeply rooted in the ethos of the China Lobby.

Therefore the assumptions of the China Hands listed above are treated as subversive lies. In effect, John T. Flynn’s writing reflects a campaign of censorship akin to that of Henry Luce or Whittaker Chambers.

Later, scholars condemned the China Lobby for damaging to America’s reputation abroad by showing that anti-Communism led to harsh domestic and foreign policies. In 1969, American political scientist Michael Parenti articulated the following critique of the repressive ethos and the corruption it endorses:

Convinced that communism is the greatest menace ever to beset mankind, and [reinforced] in that belief by demonic stereotypes, moral double standards, and enormous military power, American anti-communists find license to commit any number of heinous actions in order to counter the ‘menace’; thereby they perpetrate greater human miseries and dangers than the ones they allegedly seek to eradicate and they become the very evil they profess to combat.¹⁰²

The China Lobby may have swung United States popular opinion and politics too far, but they unquestionably made an impact by glorifying Chiang Kai-shek. They also

¹⁰⁰ John T. Flynn, *While You Slept: Our Tragedy in Asia and Who Made It* (New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1951), 66.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁰² Michael Parenti, *The Anti-Communist Impulse* (New York: Random House, 1969), 9.

delegitimised and demonised the Chinese Communists. Reckless anti-communism in the United States rested on the fear of a growing global communist conspiracy that was completely disproportionate to the actual level of international communist collusion:

Communism was once feared and hated because it allegedly represented a unified global conspiracy dedicated to our obliteration. Having realized that the ‘communist world’ is riddled with conflict, many anti-communists now assert that ‘competing’ communists are just as dangerous and ‘conspiring’ ones.¹⁰³

By exaggerating the communist threat, the right-wing writers of the China Lobby bolstered Cold War acrimony.

Gauging or Engaging Mao: The Likelihood of Friendly Sino-American Relations

Ironically in the midst of all of this anti-Communism and censorship, the China Hands managed to learn things that, if applied, could have made a significant impact on United States foreign policy. Recent Cold War scholarship has shed light on the possibility of diplomatic relations between the United States and communist China long before Nixon’s visit. While China’s association with the Soviet Union was a significant roadblock, it was not necessarily a deciding factor. As Niu Jun’s study of the origins of the Sino-Soviet alliance demonstrates: “The CCP strongly condemned the United States in part to show solidarity with the socialist bloc and in part to promote the anti-imperialist enthusiasm of Chinese masses. [But] some CCP leaders still felt it was possible to establish diplomatic relations with the United States.”¹⁰⁴ Moreover Leffler notes that

¹⁰³ Parenti, *The Anti-Communist Impulse*, 27.

¹⁰⁴ Niu Jun, “The Origins of the Sino-Soviet Alliance,” in *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963*, edited by Odd Arne Westad (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 68.

“bitter suspicions” existed between Mao and Stalin,¹⁰⁵ a fact unknown to most Americans, especially the China Lobby. In contrast, China Hands on the ground recognised these developments and tried to influence foreign policy in an opposite direction.

Despite tensions between the United States and the Communists in early 1949, Jun notes: “Mao still permitted officers from the [...] foreign affairs department to hold several talks with US Ambassador John Leighton Stuart to explore the possibilities for establishing ties between New China and the United States.”¹⁰⁶ Aside from traditional state actors such as Stuart, many foreign correspondents on the ground in China also met with Mao Zedong and his fellow revolutionaries. The impressions they received from the Communists were telling. The Associated Press’ John Roderick spent time with them in the 1940s and became particularly infatuated with these mysterious ideologues. The Communists’ first foreign minister was welcoming to the American correspondent: “He made you feel important.”¹⁰⁷ During his time spent at Communist Party headquarters in Yen’an (Yan’an / Yanan) in remote Northwest China, Roderick also developed a close relationship with the leader: “I saw Mao practically everyday.”¹⁰⁸ This allowed him to engage Mao in critical discussion about the future of Sino-American relations.

To Roderick’s surprise, the Communist leader actually entertained the idea of bringing in American corporations to the People’s Republic of China. Despite his anti-capitalist worldview, Mao Zedong saw that United States businesses could be beneficial to the struggling rural peasantry. According to Roderick, Mao signalled a desire for good relations with United States: “Later he asked me, would somebody like Montgomery

¹⁰⁵ Melvyn P. Leffler, *The Specter of Communism: The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1917-1953* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 92.

¹⁰⁶ Jun, “The Origins of the Sino-Soviet Alliance,” 68.

¹⁰⁷ John Roderick, “Assignment: China - The Chinese Civil War,” *USC US-China Institute* video 2:00, <http://china.usc.edu/assignment-china-chinese-civil-war>.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

Ward or Sears be willing to come to China to start a mail order business, because he said China was so big and the communications so bad that [it would] be a wonderful thing."¹⁰⁹ On face value, American retail enterprises like Montgomery Ward and Sears seem to contradict the Marxist doctrine of the Chinese Communists. Nevertheless, Roderick's findings reflect Mao's degree of pragmatism in his foreign policy. The United States was not an inherently evil capitalist nation with nothing to offer to China.

Sidney Rittenberg was another left-wing journalist stationed in Yenan during the Chinese Civil War. He supported the Communists and was often asked to translate for Mao and other officials during his years on the ground in the 1940s. Like his contemporaries, he found that Mao Zedong and his followers were receptive to negotiations with the United States: "They were very open to Americans at that point; they were open to conversations."¹¹⁰ He offers the following justification for their desire to seek United States diplomatic recognition: "I think the main thing was... the legitimacy of their regime. They had areas around 180 million population in China, scattered areas... in North China."¹¹¹ But this support base existed primarily in the rural interior of the country. The Kuomintang still held a solid grip on the populations living in urban industrial areas. Perhaps Mao felt that if he secured diplomatic ties with a foreign power like the United States, he would be able to expand his sphere of influence and thereby gain international legitimacy. Either way, Rittenberg's work reflected the Communists' willingness to open dialogue with their perceived enemy, the United States.

Unfortunately, the stateside China Lobby did not reciprocate this pragmatic worldview.

¹⁰⁹ John Roderick, "Assignment: China - The Chinese Civil War," *USC US-China Institute* video 2:00, <http://china.usc.edu/assignment-china-chinese-civil-war>.

¹¹⁰ Sidney Rittenberg, "Assignment: China - The Chinese Civil War," *USC US-China Institute* video, <http://china.usc.edu/assignment-china-chinese-civil-war>.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

Other correspondents arranged much sought after interviews with Mao Zedong. Seymour Topping was able to coordinate the Communist leader's radio transmissions for the Associated Press. Although Mao was willing to negotiate with the Americans, the heightened censorship on the home front prevented it being aired. Topping explains:

Mao Tse-tung was eager to come to an understanding with the United States...I was able to make an arrangement whereby [Mao's] dispatches were transmitted on the Communist radio and picked up by the AP monitor in San Francisco. There was so much anti-communist feeling in the United States that this interview did not get the attention it deserved.¹¹²

Evidently, these correspondents uncovered a reality that deviated from the prevailing – and building – anti-Communist ideology. Anna Louise Strong conducted another rare interview with Mao Zedong in 1946. She was able to speak candidly with the Communist leader. This intimate conversation produced interesting commentary on the nature of the Chinese Civil War and the prospect of amicable post-war Sino-American relations. An excerpt of the interview is as follows:

Strong: Do you think there is hope for a political, a peaceful settlement of China's problems in the near future?

Mao: That depends on the attitude of the U.S. government. If the American people stay the hands of the American reactionaries who are helping Chiang Kai-shek fight the civil war, there is hope for peace.¹¹³

Given the United States' imperial aggression in Asia, Mao Zedong was sceptical of a post-war peace. Still, his interview with Strong demonstrates some willingness for compromise with the capitalist power – or at least enough political awareness to sell himself as a pragmatist to an American audience.

What these correspondents experienced contrasted the narrative pushed by the

¹¹² Seymour Topping, "Assignment: China - The Chinese Civil War," *USC US-China Institute* video 5:45, <http://china.usc.edu/assignment-china-chinese-civil-war>.

¹¹³ Anna Louise Strong, "Talk with Mao, August, 1946," *Selected Works of Mao-Tse Tung Vol. IV* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1969).

China Lobby and traditional Cold War views. Chiang was not a benevolent leader, nor was the communist threat in China representative of an international conspiracy. In his study of United States foreign policy, Hixson explains:

Despite almost hysterical fears of monolithic communism, the Sino-Soviet alliance, [...] lacked deep roots. Confronted by increasingly militant U.S. “imperialist” opposition, Mao felt forced to ally with the USSR even though Stalin had scarcely support the Chinese revolution.¹¹⁴

The United States’ irrational fears of global communism led it to support Chiang Kai-shek, the Communists’ mortal enemy. On the ground, the China Hands pushed other options. According to Jun: “The New China and the United States could, given time, establish a normal relationship even though it had to be ranked behind that with the Soviet Union.”¹¹⁵ A Communist victory did not make Sino-American relations impossible. But the China Lobby’s reckless ideology helped make rapprochement feel wrong and – more to the point – rendered it politically and publicly untenable.

Michael Hunt’s study of ideology and foreign policy gets to the crux of the China Lobby’s myopia. His analysis is centred on the United States’ failure to properly assess and respond to foreign revolutions around the world:

Our inability even in the face of failure to modify our rigid, reflexive attitudes toward revolutions has tended to make a bad situation worse. This inflexibility had made Washington unresponsive to overtures from new revolutionary regimes eager to neutralize American hostility and thereby avoid a prolonged and costly confrontation. Confirmed in their suspicions of implacable American hostility, revolutionary leaders have turned to cultivate friends in the anti-American camp. Mao’s China, driven deeper into the Soviet embrace following the flat rejection of overtures in 1949, offers a particularly dramatic instance of this commonplace phenomenon that has proven strategically costly for the United States.¹¹⁶

The failure of the American government to establish diplomatic ties with Communist

¹¹⁴ Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*, 176.

¹¹⁵ Jun, “The Origins of the Sino-Soviet Alliance,” 67.

¹¹⁶ Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 175.

China reflected its scepticism of all foreign revolutions. But is also reflected their specific distrust of Communist governments. In essence, the United States brought the disruption in Sino-American relations upon itself. The China Hands' advice and articles held different answers, but Washington policy makers ignored them.

The Legacy of the China Hands–China Lobby Dichotomy:

The full force of the China Lobby would not be quelled for another twenty years. In the early 1970s, a new direction in United States foreign policy signified the end of anti-Communism's mainstream appeal. As Richard Kagan observed in 1974, the "[China Lobby's] strength institutionally has waned. Final proof of its decline in strength since the 1950s is its failure to marshal a significant protest campaign against the seating of the Peoples' Republic of China in the United Nations or against President Nixon's visit to China."¹¹⁷ These two key events reflected the China Lobby's declining influence and the shifting political landscape. Ninkovich points out that by the time Richard Nixon was in office in 1972, China was worth a lot more to the United States. Its role in the global economy had grown measurably since the Communist Revolution of 1949: "Until the remarkable expansion of economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s, Asia had a symbolic importance out of all proportion to its actual economic and strategic value."¹¹⁸ Accordingly, Nixon switched gears regarding China. The former advocate of the China Lobby eventually led the charge to re-establish relations with the People's Republic.¹¹⁹ By the 1970s, postwar anti-Communism had waned and a new approach was feasible,

¹¹⁷ Richard C. Kagan, "Introduction," in *The China Lobby in American Politics*, by Ross Y. Koen (New York: Octagon Books, 1974), ix.

¹¹⁸ Frank A. Ninkovich, *The Wilsonian Century: U.S. Foreign Policy since 1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 167.

¹¹⁹ Kagan, "Introduction," in *The China Lobby*, xi.

even for a Republican president.

Overlooking Mao's early willingness to talk was an active political choice orchestrated by the China Lobby stateside. The China Hands in the field envisioned a different future. In essence, they saw something the China Lobby could not:

In retrospect, however, it seems that first-hand observers of the 1930s and 1940s were closer to the truth than those who condemned them in the 1950s. During the McCarthy period of American history, it was easy to conclude that the CCP was just another subservient satellite of the Soviet Union. But the Sino-Soviet split and the emergence of communist polycentrism have necessitated a reappraisal of basic assumptions.¹²⁰

The China Hands missed the Communists' internal threat – the regime ultimately killed millions – but they correctly identified China's autonomy from the Soviet Union and the CCP regime's early popularity. Moreover, these foreign correspondents recognised Mao's flexibility and charisma – not to mention Chiang's personal failings. China Hands embraced Mao's radical ideology without losing any sense of their American patriotism. Friendly Sino-American relations, even in the aftermath of a Communist Revolution, were a real possibility from a Chinese perspective. Internal and international pressures closed American eyes.

Strictly speaking, the China Lobby anti-Communism was not a spontaneous post-World War II phenomenon. Indeed, 'red scares' about the communist threat influenced US foreign policy for many decades. According to Hixson:

Framing the Cold War as a postwar phenomenon facilitated placing the onus for the conflict on 'Soviet expansionism.' This frame elides the extent to which identity driven Bolshevik enemy-othering prevailed throughout the interwar period. It also obscures that the renewed Cold War flowed from the failure of World War II to deliver on the promise of a 'liberated Europe' or of a 'democratic China.'¹²¹

¹²⁰ Shewmaker, "The Agrarian Reformer Myth," 80.

¹²¹ Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*, 163.

The Cold War merely amplified existing hatreds and fears. Those sympathetic to the Communist Revolution in China were thus targeted in the same vein as those who supported the Russian Revolution decades earlier.

Heonik Kwon's *The Other Cold War* also challenges traditional narratives of the conflict. He writes: "There has never been a conflict called *the* cold war. The bipolarised human community of the twentieth century experienced political bifurcation in radically different ways across societies – ways that cannot be forced into a single coherent conceptual whole."¹²² As this thesis demonstrates, the Communist Revolution in China cannot easily be dismissed as a Cold War proxy. While it is true that both American and Soviet power influenced the conflict, many characteristics of the China Hands and the China Lobby transcend the traditional bipolar narrative. China Hands, for instance, interpreted the Chinese Civil War in terms of longer histories of anti-fascism and Marxism. The China Lobby, for its part, saw the conflict through decades of 'Open Door' aspirations to see Kuomintang China as a Christian, democratic, and capitalist nation-state rather than a corrupt quasi-dictatorship. On the whole, different sensibilities caused non-state actors to react heterogeneously.

Conclusion:

This era of Sino-American relations cannot be interpreted as simply another chapter in East-West geopolitics. Instead, it must be viewed within the context of other deep-seated trends such as fascism, Marxism and American conservatism. The China Hands drew on leftist political backgrounds; the China Lobby was inspired by right-wing dimensions of the Open Door. These sources of inspiration produced contradictory

¹²² Kwon, *The Other Cold War*, 6.

narratives of the Chinese Civil War. On the ground, foreign correspondents criticised Chiang and praised Mao. Of course, Mao Zedong's regime ended up more repressive than that of Chiang Kai-shek. The unprecedented, but scripted access to CCP inner circles helped Mao and his cohorts manipulate reporters. The un-flattering lens of retrospection shows the China Hands, at times, were gullible and naïve. Regardless, the conclusions felt right at the moment for those individuals in the field.

Back in the United States, political, business and media elites were ultimately correct in denouncing Mao Zedong. The Chinese leader quickly resorted to the more and worse autocratic tendencies than his Nationalist predecessor. At the same time, political blindness skewed the China Lobby's characterisation of Chiang Kai-shek. Rather than a benevolent democrat, he proved to be an egotistical dictator. All things considered, the work of non-state actors sheds light on how the Chinese Civil War and the subsequent Communist Revolution transcended the Cold War. Americans interpreted Chinese politics differently depending on their unique personal histories and localities.

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