

ALLIES TO ENEMIES: RACE, RELIGION AND AMERICAN PERCEPTIONS OF CHINA FROM 1937-1953

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The years 1937-1953 witnessed an incredible turnabout in US foreign policy; China was transformed from a praised ally into a demonized enemy. Along with a drastic change in formal diplomatic relations came changes in American perceptions of Chinese themselves. These perceptions were shaped by a long tradition of “yellow peril” anxieties, but also a mixture of missionary zeal to Christianize China and capitalize on its markets. Throughout the Pacific War, Americans characterized China as an honorable ally. Much of this support was based on the strong cultural and Christian ties Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek and his wife Soong Mei-ling had to the United States, despite clear evidence of corruption and a lack of popular support. Following the war, Mao Zedong’s Communists triumphed over the Nationalists and Americans were left asking: “who lost China?” With the entrance of the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army into the Korean War, Americans completed the dramatic reconstruction of the Chinese, imagining them as an inscrutable, treacherous enemy. Yet whether considered allies or enemies, influential American leaders in the government and media produced discourse and imagery of Chinese that appealed to the racial and religious preconceptions of the majority of Americans, the implications of which reverberate to the present.

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Introduction

The years 1937-1953 witnessed an incredible turnabout in US foreign policy; China, the once fabled land of immense wealth and vast markets, was transformed from a praised ally into a demonized enemy. Along with the drastic change in formal diplomatic relations came changes in American perceptions of Chinese. These perceptions were shaped by a long tradition of “yellow peril” anxieties mixed with missionary zeal to Christianize the Chinese masses. Yet whether characterizing China as an honorable ally or inscrutable enemy, influential American leaders in the government and media produced discourse and imagery that appealed to the racial and religious preconceptions of the majority of Americans.¹ In doing so, US foreign policy toward

China favored Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists over Mao Zedong and the Communists throughout the 1940s. The fall of the Nationalists in 1949, however, led many Americans to question “who lost China?” and to dramatically reconstruct the Chinese in racial and religious terms.

It is necessary to point out that not all Americans held the same views on the Chinese, and not all Chinese were viewed in the same way by Americans. As the Nationalists competed with the Communists, China became a contended space not only for Chinese but for Americans as well. But to

the largest, most powerful and influential ethno-racial group in the United States. For the purposes of this paper, I simply use the term “Americans” to denote this particular group of Americans unless noted otherwise. See Alexander DeConde, *Ethnicity, Race and American Foreign Policy: A History* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992).

¹ This paper focuses on what Alexander DeConde refers to as “Anglo-Americans”: white Americans with Anglo-Saxon cultural and religious roots who made up

the consternation of Americans who witnessed the corruption of the Nationalists and the vibrancy of the communists, US policy remained committed to the former. The decision to support Chiang was anchored by his Christian ties to the US, which proved too strong for Americans pursuing a more realistic policy involving Mao's Communists. The defeat of the Nationalists at the hands of the Communists resulted in shock and disappointment, followed by hatred and fear when war broke out on the Korean peninsula. The image of a Christian capitalist China led by Chiang disappeared and the old image of Chinese as heathen barbarians re-emerged in the form of Mao's Communists who posed a racial and religious threat to the United States.

The first part of this paper discusses how Chinese were portrayed in a positive light during the Pacific War, despite the contending views of Americans in China who were critical of Chiang's Nationalists and/or enamored by Mao's Communists. The second part examines how stubborn American support for a Chiang-led China led to confrontation with Mao's communist forces in the Korean War and the reframing of mainland Chinese as a religious and racial threat to Americans. Throughout the paper, special attention is given to the perceptions of various influential Americans who viewed Chiang and Mao, and indeed all of China, through a racial and religious lens.

The Pacific War: China, the American Ally

As Japan grew in military power and continued to expand its empire in Northeast Asia in the 1930s, American foreign policymakers were determined to protect their interests in East Asia, particularly in China. Japan was on its doorstep, but China remained embroiled in a civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists. However, Japan's aggressive invasion in 1937 led the Chinese to form a frail unified front and the Americans to prop up Chinese resistance through Chiang's Nationalists. The reality that China was splintered and weak was not the image portrayed to Americans back home. As the war progressed the need for a stalwart ally on the Asian mainland that could pin down Japanese troops led the US

government to construct an image of China as a strong, honorable ally.

However, some Americans like Charles Lindbergh framed WWII in explicitly racial terms. In November 1939, Lindbergh penned an article for *Reader's Digest* warning Americans that entering the war "will reduce the strength and destroy the treasures of the White race" and "may even lead to the end of our civilization." He urged Americans to "preserve that most priceless possession, our inheritance of European blood," and to "guard ourselves against attack by foreign armies and dilution by foreign races."² Though clearly against joining the war in Europe, Lindbergh willingly joined the war against Japan after the attack on Pearl Harbor. To Lindbergh and other Americans, the White race was in danger, and the Japanese seemed to prove his point at Pearl Harbor. Yet in spite of such views, the US remained connected to China, a non-white yet key strategic ally against Japanese aggression.

To overcome their incongruous views of Asians, Americans reconstructed the Chinese as the "good Asians" in comparison to the Japanese who had fully manifested as the "yellow peril."³ The perceived racial character of Chinese, though still Asian and below that of whites, was reconfigured in a way that praised their more positive traits while simultaneously decrying those of the Japanese.⁴ For example, in 1942 US Secretary of State Cordell Hull stated "the Japanese masses are on the level of barbarians led by the worst

² Charles Lindbergh, "Aviation, Geography and Race" *Reader's Digest* 35 (November 1939): 64-67.

³ There is a plethora of sources depicting the "yellow peril" (a term coined by Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1895). For example, US historian Lothrop Stoddard expressed this fear in *The Rising Tide of Color: The Threat Against White World Supremacy* in 1920. John Dower's *War Without Mercy* offers a wealth of examples of American "yellow peril" racist portrayals of Japan during WWII.

⁴ See for example, *Time* magazine's article "How to Tell your Friends from the Japs" published two weeks after Pearl Harbor in December 1941, which contains a "few rules of thumb" such as "the Chinese expression is likely to be more placid, kindly, open; the Japanese more positive, dogmatic, arrogant."

elements of savage barbarism,”⁵ while in a State of the Union address President Roosevelt declared that in the fight against such barbarians “we shall be joined with the heroic people of China—that great people whose ideals of peace are so closely akin to our own.”⁶ Ironically though, Americans had little love for the Chinese prior to WWII. Indeed, the Chinese Exclusion Act had officially banned Chinese migrants from coming to American shores, and Chinese Americans often suffered from racial discrimination and prejudice. A small but steadfast contingent of missionaries and government officials (the so-called China Hands) did construct more positive images of the Chinese, but they were often infused with notions of American superiority. But regardless of these views, in light of the Japanese threat, China was quickly reconstructed as a strategic ally and a noble friend.

Such rhetoric about America’s enemies and allies was virtually as important as bullets and bombs were in fighting the Pacific War, and it reveals the drastically different ways in which Chinese and Japanese were portrayed. But as Americans produced racist propaganda about Japan, the Japanese were producing their own pan-Asian propaganda that portrayed Americans as white, racist, imperialists. The potential effects of this propaganda in Asia stoked American fears of a unified Yellow Peril that could threaten the US and her allies. American policy and opinion-makers recognized that allying with China would counter Japanese propaganda as well as providing strategic military benefits to the US. Concerned that the Japanese propaganda may create a union of “orientals” against “occidentals,” Adviser on Political Relations Stanley Hornbeck concluded that supporting China in the war was well worth the “comparatively small cost”; not only would it allow the use of China as a base of operations from which to attack Japan, but it would prevent the loss of the whole Far East as allies who could

⁵ “Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of State, May 11, 1942,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, 1942, Europe*, Volume II (Washington: GPO, 1962), Document 620.

⁶ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “State of the Union Address,” January 7, 1943.

otherwise be “turned against the Occident.”⁷ The State Department concurred, stressing that it was imperative that China not “withdraw from confidence in and reliance upon the US, and move into a position of reliance upon the Soviet Union or acceptance of the Japanese thesis that oriental peoples must combine in opposition to the influence of occidental peoples.”⁸ Though the motivation to support China originated as military strategy, it proved itself equally effective as racial strategy—recognizing and supporting China as an ally was a small price to pay if the “Occident” could prevent the formation of a unified Yellow Peril.

The war against Japan certainly played a key role in setting the baseline for how Americans perceived China, but the Chinese were not only constructed vis-à-vis American views of the Japanese—they were also compared and contrasted as Nationalists and the Communists. The former, led by Chiang Kai-shek, held the key to American support by virtue of Chiang’s American connections and his Christian, “westernized” character. The Communists on the other hand, led by Mao Zedong, lacked such connections despite receiving the favor and praise of some American journalists and officials that visited Mao’s base at Yan’an. But no matter the actual effectiveness of Mao as compared to Chiang, Mao lacked the credentials to make him an acceptable ally for many American leaders and the general American public.

Christianity and Capitalism: Chiang Kai-shek

The importance of Chiang Kai-shek’s connection to American Christianity should not be understated. Chiang’s wife Soong Mei-ling (commonly known as Madame Chiang) and her family had deep connections with the US, engendering high regard for their pro-American, Christian beliefs. David Halberstam argues that Chiang’s marriage to Soong was what galvanized Chiang’s political and social connections with “those who longed for that

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ “Document Prepared in the Department of State, December 27, 1943,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1943, China*, (Washington: GPO, 1957), Document 421.

most unrealistic of things, a modern, nationalist Chinese leader who was both Christian and capitalist.”⁹ Together, the Chiangs presented the ideal China that Americans hoped and prayed for: a China made in the image of American Christianity and capitalism.

Another key element of the spiritual connections and hopes Americans held for China resides in the American missionary movement. Harold Isaacs contended that the deeply embedded missionary network in China acted as “the carrier of the most deeply-persuaded partisanship, favoring not merely China or the Chinese, their character, their society, or their civilization, but a particular Chinese government and its particular leaders.”¹⁰ Chiang’s Christian reputation, fortified by that of Madame Chiang’s, earned him unbridled support among American missionaries and Christian leaders. By 1937, Chiang’s partisans were instrumental in cultivating both public views and official policy in favor of Chiang and the Nationalists.¹¹ One such partisan was John Leighton Stuart.

Missionary and later ambassador to China, John Leighton Stuart exemplified the American desire for a Christian China made in America’s image. For all the evidence of Chiang’s corrupt and abusive rule, Stuart persisted himself in defending Chiang’s character and reputation. Stuart “never had any question as to the moral character of the Generalissimo” and clearly admired Chiang, who, “in contrast with the venality, avarice, indolence and cowardice of many of the traditional ‘Mandarins,’ his nobility of character stands out as exceptional.”¹² Although Stuart worked with General George Marshall to mediate negotiations between the Communists and the Nationalists after becoming a US ambassador in 1946, he continued to favor Chiang over Mao on moral grounds. In the end, Stuart was committed to Chiang, or at least

what he believed Chiang to be. But Stuart and the American missionary network were not alone in their support of Chiang.

Representative of Montana, Michael J. Mansfield, was sent on a special mission by President Roosevelt in 1944 to survey the war effort in China. Mansfield’s report to Roosevelt maintained the positive aura surrounding Chiang Kai-shek by labeling him “a remarkable leader” and “the one man in China with sufficient prestige to carry her through the war.” Mansfield acknowledged that Chiang had his faults, but nonetheless maintained that “on the basis of what he has done and in spite of some of the things he has done, *he is China.*”¹³ Chiang represented to Mansfield, and to many Americans, what China should be: Christian, capitalist, and as westernized as possible. On these grounds, Mansfield concluded that the US should remain committed to Chiang and support him “to the best of our ability.” But he also stressed that the impetus behind this was to “save as many American lives as possible.”¹⁴ According to Mansfield, US policy was to prop up Chiang’s Nationalists so they could shed the blood that Americans did not want to spill. Such a policy relegated the lives of Chinese to be less important than Americans and revealed that support for Chiang was laced with a sense of American superiority.

In addition to government officials and missionaries, influential figures in the media played a central role in shaping public opinion and reflecting official policy. Arguably the most powerful, and most vocal of these, was ardent Chiang-supporter Henry Luce. The media mogul’s *Time* and *Life* magazines had become widely read, influential sources of news and information for many Americans in the mid-twentieth century. Luce became the heart of the “China lobby” and worked hard to enlist support for his friend and hero—Chiang Kai-shek. Growing up on an

⁹ David Halberstam, *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War* (New York: Hyperion, 2007), 226.

¹⁰ Harold R. Isaacs, *Scratches on Our Minds: American Images of China and India* (New York: The John Day Company, 1958), 162.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹² John Leighton Stuart, *Fifty Years in China: The Memoirs of John Leighton Stuart, Missionary and Ambassador* (New York: Random House, 1954), 275.

¹³ *Foreign Relations of the United States: diplomatic papers, 1945, The Far East, China, Volume VII, 893.00/1–1645*, “Representative Michael J. Mansfield, of Montana, to President Roosevelt,” (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1945), 20. Emphasis added.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 21, 18.

isolated missionary compound in Shandong gave Luce a limited, distorted view of China, one which would remain so. Moreover, his Christian worldview precluded the possibility of supporting a “godless leader” such as Mao. Consequentially, *Time* provided obsequious depictions of Chiang as “the alert, taut, indefatigable Generalissimo, the first architect of victory and now the first hope of peace.”¹⁵ His wife, “the beautiful Madame Chiang” was given similar praise for her “enthusiastic leadership to every good cause.”¹⁶ Under their leadership, *Time* claimed that “China made extraordinary progress, both moral and material.”¹⁷ But as Robert Herzstein notes, Luce “relegated journalistic inquiry to a distant second place, behind his moral commitment to Chiang’s Nationalist cause” and he believed “China would enter a new marvelous age in which Christianity, modern science, and the American big brother would bring blessings of liberty and salvation to 450 million Chinese.”¹⁸ Millions of Americans also longed to help achieve Luce’s vision. Among those generating support for China were filmmakers who participated by portraying Chiang and the Chinese in a heroic manner. Documentaries such as *The Battle of China 1942* and *Inside Fighting China* (1942) follow this theme, but make it clear that the brave heroes were the Nationalists led by Chiang. The United China Relief, an organization founded in 1941 and led by board members such as Luce and Pearl Buck, produced propaganda posters and films to garner support for the Chinese war effort. One such film, *Here is China*, portrays the Chinese as brave, friendly, and industrious people full of potential and goodness. In the same vein as Buck’s *The Good Earth*¹⁹ the film creates an idyllic picture of

¹⁵ “China: I am Very Optimistic,” *Time*, September 3, 1945.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Robert E. Herzstein, *Henry R. Luce, Time, and the American Crusade in Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 11.

¹⁹ *The Good Earth* (1937) was a film based on Buck’s 1931 novel of the same name, and starred white actors portraying Chinese. The book and film were critically acclaimed and helped shaped American views of Chinese at the time.

China, but it also tries to explain how the Chinese “are like us” and can progress under American tutelage. The narrator extols “the millions and millions of China who fight the good fight with us and who will keep the faith with us, in victory and in peace.”²⁰ These millions, however, only included the Generalissimo and the Nationalists. No mention whatsoever is made of Mao and the Communists fighting “the good fight” against Japan. Such films demonstrate how perceptions of China were dominated by a conspicuously unbalanced picture of what, and who, the Chinese were.

Regardless of all the posters, articles, films, and opinions surrounding Chiang and China, it was the US government’s policy that mattered most to China. In the final year of WWII, President Truman sent a cable to President Chiang on July 5 stating: “With respect and affection, we salute the Chinese nation—our long-tested friend, our comrade in battle, and our valued associate in the great work that lies ahead.”²¹ In the footsteps of Roosevelt, Truman clearly outlined the official stance towards Chiang’s China, placing the US firmly on the side of the Nationalists and pinning American hopes and dreams for China on Chiang. However, Chiang was not the only one laying claim to “the Chinese nation”; Mao and the Communists offered a different vision for China’s future.

Stifled Support: Mao Zedong

Despite the overwhelmingly positive support for Chiang during the years of WWII, not all Americans became resolute supporters of Chiang Kai-shek and his Nationalist regime. Although Americans in the US were typically swayed by the image of a Christian, democratic and westernized Chinese leader, Americans residing in China often saw things differently. Privy to observing the reality of Chiang’s corrupt Nationalists and in

²⁰ *Here is China*, narrated by Clifton Fadiman (United China Relief, 1944).

²¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States: diplomatic papers, 1945*, The Far East, China, Volume VII, 893.458/7–545: Telegram, “President Truman to President Chiang Kai-shek, Washington, July 5, 1945.” (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1945), 127.

some cases Mao's Communists at Yan'an, a number of journalists and government officials illuminated an alternative to Chiang and the Nationalists. They struggled, however, to make their voices heard in government and media circles. Edgar Snow was perhaps the most well-known of those who met Mao and offered an inside look into the communist side of China. Snow wrote admiringly about Mao and the Communists in his seminal book, *Red Star Over China*. Like Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth*, Snow's book served to generate sympathy for the Chinese and even for the Communists. Even as tensions flared between the Communists and the Nationalists after the war, American officials continued to be enamored by the earthy simplicity and "rural equalitarianism"²² of Mao's revolutionary forces in contrast to the decadence and corruption of Chiang's Nationalists. Although such accounts stirred some Americans to acknowledge and even admire the Communists, the public and government sentiment still leaned strongly toward Chiang's Nationalists and media sources such as *Time* worked to continue this support by producing positive portrayals of Chiang and limiting favorable portrayals of Mao. Theodore White, a journalist for *Time* who visited Yan'an and lavished praise on Mao and the Communists, locked horns with Henry Luce over how to depict China. Luce deplored White's critical stance toward the Nationalists and his sympathy for the Communists while White was repulsed by Luce's deliberate bias toward Chiang and against Mao.²³ Initially a supporter of Chiang, White came to be one of the Americans who saw through the thin veneer of Chiang's ostensibly Christian, democratic and heroic leadership and was appalled by the corruption that was rotting away the Nationalists' power and credibility. In light of such flagrant abuse of power and US aid, Americans such as White were intrigued by the seemingly free, egalitarian society led by Mao at Yan'an. Yet White, like Snow and others, was antagonized by those such as Luce who remained unequivocally committed to Chiang. After White

²² Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (New York: Random House, 1938), 211.

²³ Herzstein, *Henry R. Luce*, 45.

submitted an article depicting the Communists in a favorable light, Luce reluctantly decided to publish it, but forced White to remove anything that could undermine support for Chiang.²⁴ Eventually, unable to settle his differences with Luce, White was forced to resign from *Time*.²⁵ To Luce and others of his ilk, Chiang was in essence "holy ground" not to be treaded upon by intrepid reporters such as White.

Upon returning to the US, White and Annalee Jacoby wrote and published *Thunder out of China* in 1946 as a scathing critique of US policy in China. They attacked the corrupt Nationalists, juxtaposed them with the Communists, and argued that China's future must include the Communists. Their book had relative success, selling over half a million copies after its first printing, but their message ultimately fell on deaf ears. In an interview, Jacoby explained how "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 Guomindang, that they weren't honest Christian democrats, that they weren't beloved by their people, and would win a well-deserved triumph."²⁶ Jacoby also shared that Whittaker Chambers, the virulent anti-communist editor of *Time*, completely re-wrote one of her articles and even made up a dialogue for an interview she had with Chiang. Chambers and Luce were willing to go to such length to better portray Chiang and engineer support for him among Americans.

In spite of the efforts of figures such as Luce, the Nationalists were not the only Chinese gaining the attention of the Americans, and pro-Chiang Americans were not the only Americans paying attention to China. Mao Zedong and his communist forces became somewhat of a sensation to a handful of pioneering American journalists and officials who were able to experience the

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ T. Christopher Jespersen, *American Images of China 1931-1949* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996), 130.

²⁶ Interview with Annalee Jacoby, Mike Chinoy, "Assignment: China - The Chinese Civil War" USC US China Institute 2012.

revolution first hand at Yan'an.²⁷ Of course, part of the praise for the Communists arose from intense dissatisfaction with the endemic corruption and abuse of Chiang's regime in Chungking during the war.²⁸ Even so, this group of Americans provided an alternative narrative to that of Chiang's Nationalist China and the US alliance with it. Increasingly frustrated American officials and journalists combined to challenge the legitimacy of Chiang and his regime, all to the chagrin of those supporting a theoretically democratic, Christian-led China. Yet even though the public was given a glimpse of what was really going on in China, the political climate in the US was conservative and official policy remained steadfast in its commitment to Chiang, even when challenged from within.²⁹

US Policy in China: Notions of Superiority and Suspicion

In a telegram from the Military Mission in Chungking to the War Department in February 1942, General John Magruder wrote an honest critique of the Chinese war effort and the Americans that, in his view, supported them blindly. Magruder pointed out the gap between perceptions and reality regarding the capability and effectiveness of the Nationalists in fighting Japan. Yet, Magruder's analysis does not merely disparage the Chinese for their lack of effort and capability; Magruder pins blame on "Chinese propagandists in America" and "the sponsorship accorded such propaganda on the part of many outstanding individuals, including missionaries" for deceiving the American general public. Magruder surmises that "The realization of its falsity would undoubtedly result in the lessening of positive American support for Chinese

²⁷ In addition to journalists such as Snow and White, American diplomats and military officials spent time in Yan'an as part of the Dixie Mission (US Army Observation Group) from 1944-1947.

²⁸ Joseph Stilwell was perhaps the most outspoken of those in opposition to Chiang Kai-shek and influenced Theodore White and others to be more critical of his leadership.

²⁹ Joyce Hoffman, *Theodore H. White and Journalism as Illusion* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995), 57.

projects...even if it did not result in a weakening of the emotional appeal which China has always held for a great many Americans."³⁰ Magruder's insights reveal that the notion of the Chinese as a heroic ally was a narrative carefully-spun by Americans with vested interests in China. Magruder's sentiments were echoed by the US Ambassador to China Clarence Glauss who lamented the fact that "Chiang and the Chinese have been 'built up' in the United States," and admitted that when "looking the cold facts in the face, one could only dismiss this as 'rot.'"³¹ That Glauss and Magruder's objective critiques of the Nationalists and Chiang went unheeded underscores how those in Washington partisan to Chiang rejected seemingly pragmatic policy advice. Chiang's Christian standing and his image as a westernized leader who was "like us" gave him legitimacy in the US, and this helped Chiang trump any and all concerns over his actual legitimacy in China, which in reality was gradually deteriorating. Furthermore, as a byproduct of the support given to Chiang, American policymakers were forced to reject the effective leadership and legitimacy of Mao.

While Magruder, and others like Glauss, held views on China that were shaped by realism, they were also shaped by racism. Magruder perceived the Chinese through a racial lens by adhering to the well-worn stereotype of the "inscrutable Oriental." He claimed that the Chinese love to utilize "deceptive symbolism" and have a "desire to achieve certain objectives by clever deception." Moreover, he believed that "People in other countries swallow such glib untruths whole without realizing that they are being deceived."³² Magruder still concluded that Chiang should be supported, but with one key caveat: that the US opposes his "exorbitant demands with prudence" and reminds Chiang that "China is putting out the

³⁰ *Foreign relations of the United States: diplomatic papers*, 1942, China, "Military Mission in Chungking to the War Department" (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1942), 14.

³¹ Clarence E. Glauss, found in Isaacs, *Scratches on Our Minds*, 187.

³² *Diplomatic papers*, 1942, China, "Military Mission in Chungking," 14.

least war-effort of all the Allies.”³³ Magruder’s critique may have been free of religious bias toward Chiang, but it was steeped in a sense of racial superiority over the Chinese. A response from the Chief of the Division of Far Eastern Affairs, Maxwell Hamilton, reinforced the need to support Chiang while simultaneously maintaining a sense of superiority over the Chinese. Though challenging some of Magruder’s claims, Hamilton conceded that there was inefficiency present in modern China. Meanwhile, he located this incompetence in China’s history, claiming such inefficiency had existed “for centuries.” Furthermore, Hamilton posited there was “a renaissance of spirit flowing from China’s contacts with the Occident, principally its contacts with the United States.”³⁴ Hamilton clearly attributed any strength in China to the influence of the US, implying American superiority over the Chinese. He also linked the “spirit” that China was receiving from the US to the “great leader” Chiang Kai-shek, who represented the progression of the Chinese spirit. Although he asserted that China at that time may have lacked the materiel to effectively counter the Japanese surge, Hamilton nonetheless concluded that the US should continue to build upon Chiang and allow the “spirit of liberty” to flow from Americans to Chinese. Magruder and Hamilton are two telling examples of the sense of racial superiority that was common among generals, diplomats, journalists, and missionaries alike. Harold Isaacs keenly observed that Americans held onto “the power and self-justifying convictions of the superiority of the Western white man of the nineteenth century.” This deep-seated belief in “the superiority of their own race, civilization, and religion” seemed clear when comparing themselves to “the puny, starving, ignorant peoples” of China who professed “plainly sinful and heathenish religions.”³⁵ Whether subtle or unconcealed, Americans across various social

strata continued to perceive Chinese through a racial lens in the 1940s. The glowing characterizations of Madame Chiang and the resolute support of the Generalissimo during WWII seemingly contradicted the traditional racial narrative of Chinese as undesirable, backwards, uncivilized and so on. Yet one would be remiss to argue that racist views disappeared at this time. Rather, racialized views were simply modified to fit the foreign policy needs of the day. Because China was a key American ally in the Pacific theater, outright racism against the Chinese would detract from the war effort against Japan. Indeed, even the infamous immigration act barring Chinese from the US was finally reformed in 1943 in an effort to solidify the US-China alliance. However, as Michael Krenn points out, this did not mean full acceptance of Chinese on the American soil; only 105 Chinese were allowed to migrate to the US each year³⁶ and many in Congress remained fearful of “Chinese ‘hordes’ slipping into America, taking jobs, and generally lowering the quality of life.”³⁷ Despite the apparent victory of repealing the exclusionary immigration law, the Chinese remained inferior and undesirable “others” to many Americans, and within a few years war in Korea would unleash the pent-up racial prejudice held by Americans against the Chinese.

Disillusionment and Demonization: China, the American Enemy

As the Pacific War wound down, the struggle for controlling China ramped up. With Chiang’s Nationalists and Mao’s Communists vying for power, American policymakers feebly attempted to explore their options but refused to let go of the Generalissimo. The long-standing vision for a Christian China, buoyed by influential Americans who supported Chiang’s leadership, clouded US policy and ironically led to the “loss of China.”

³³ Ibid., 15.

³⁴ *Foreign relations of the United States: diplomatic papers*, 1942, China, “Memorandum by the Chief of the Division of Far Eastern Affairs, February 16” (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1942), 14.

³⁵ Isaacs, *Scratches on Our Minds*, 199.

³⁶ The annual quota of 105 new entry visas provided for Chinese remained until being increased in the Immigration and Nationality Services Act of 1965.

³⁷ Michael L. Krenn, *The Color of Empire: Race and American Foreign Relations* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2006), 71.

In August 1944, Patrick Hurley was sent as a personal envoy to China by President Roosevelt with the mission “to promote harmonious relations between General Chiang and General Stilwell and to facilitate the latter’s exercise of command over the Chinese armies placed under his direction.”³⁸ To Stilwell’s dismay, Hurley quickly sided with Chiang. In a telegram Hurley flatly laid out to the President that, “Today [the President] is confronted by a choice between Chiang Kai-shek and Stilwell.”³⁹ In a subsequent telegram, Hurley further urged the President that “if you sustain Stilwell in this controversy, you will lose Chiang Kai-shek and possibly you will lose China with him.”⁴⁰ Hurley equated Chiang with China, and at his behest, Roosevelt decided to replace the overtly anti-Chiang Stilwell with General Albert C. Wedemeyer in October 1944. The prospect of losing China to godless communists swayed the US policy to remain tied to Chiang, even if it meant recalling successful American generals. After becoming the new US Ambassador in November, Hurley attempted to remove the China Hands that he blamed for supporting the Communists and undermining US foreign policy in China. A virulent anti-Communist who disdained career China experts, Hurley epitomized the stubborn nature of US foreign policy and its commitment to maintaining a Chiang-led China. Although Hurley made a personal attempt to negotiate with Mao, he refused to concede anything to Mao that Chiang did not approve of. In his autobiography, John Paton Davies lambasted Hurley for his ego and vanity, which Davies believed had allowed both Chiang and Mao to manipulate him and skew US policy in China.⁴¹ Davies, as part of the Dixie Mission, firmly believed that the Communists offered a better practical and strategic choice for the US to ally

³⁸ John Paton Davies Jr., *China Hand: An Autobiography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 198.

³⁹ *Foreign relations of the United States: diplomatic papers*, 1942, China “Major General Patrick J. Hurley to President Roosevelt, October 10, 1944” (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1944), 154.

⁴⁰ Davies Jr., *China Hand*, 205.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

with—a view that Chiang, and his supporter Hurley, bitterly opposed.

Another member of the Dixie Mission, John S. Service, also believed the US should have cooperated with the Communists. Upon meeting Mao, Service was impressed by Mao’s deep conviction and “desire for American friendship and cooperation with China,”⁴² leading him to strongly advise cooperating with Mao. Service later lamented that had the US “shed some of its illusions about China” and chose to “adopt a realistic policy in America’s own interests” by working with—instead of against—the Communists, perhaps history would have turned out differently. He suggests the wars in Korea and Vietnam would never have taken place, Taiwan would not have become an issue, the US would never have “lost China” to begin with, and China under Mao could have been a much better place.⁴³ In the end, however, “realistic policy” took a backseat to American “illusions” and religiously-biased support for Chiang.

As the last attempt to keep the US neutral in her support of China, George Atcheson⁴⁴ and a committee including Service sent a telegram in February 1945, challenging the policy prescriptions set forth by Hurley. The telegram recommended the US provide unbiased support for the Nationalists *and* Communists, discontinue unconditional aid for Chiang, remove Chiang’s veto power over US policy, and promise that US foreign policy would remain independent yet committed to China as a whole.⁴⁵ However, this recommendation was not acted upon. Hurley and the US remained firmly in Chiang’s camp and would continue to in the postwar years.

⁴² John Service, *The Amerasia Papers: Some Problems in the History of US – China Relations* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971), 176.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 191-92.

⁴⁴ Atcheson was the Counselor of the Embassy at Chungking and Charge d’Affaires in the Ambassador’s absence. When Ambassador Hurley was on a visit to Washington, Atcheson took the opportunity to provide a different take on how the US should support China by sending a telegram to the Secretary of State.

⁴⁵ Service, *The Amerasia Papers*, 188-189.

The Red Peril: Christianity and Communism

Despite last-ditch efforts to broker an agreement between the Nationalists and the Communists in the years after Japan's surrender, the bias toward Chiang proved too great to overcome. Unwilling to break ties with Chiang, American attempts to work alongside the Communists had come far too late. The failure of the Dixie and Marshall missions left Americans with no other choice but to watch their dreams die with the Nationalist forces. Adding insult to injury, the Nationalists were not the only ones forced from the mainland; on August 2, 1949, US Ambassador John Leighton Stuart was recalled to Washington and wished a sardonic farewell by Mao himself in his article *Farewell, Leighton Stuart*.

The failure to accommodate the Communists and maintain US presence in mainland China devastated Stuart, who was forced to leave the land he was born in. Stuart's disappointment led him to condemn the newly established People's Republic of China (PRC)⁴⁶ for hypocritically proclaiming religious liberty, while placing restrictions on religious organizations and accusing missionaries of espionage and other crimes. He alleged that the Communists went after "those who had been 'poisoned' by foreign influence, including many Christians, and finally against businessmen and missionaries, whom they suspected or accused of subversive activities and of being agents of Western imperialism and aggression."⁴⁷ China's future looked bleak to many Americans, but that did not keep Stuart from retaining his hope in the "many lights of faith, of courage, of freedom that will not be extinguished." Stuart believed these lights would "someday rekindle the lamps of true democracy, liberty and justice for the great population of China."⁴⁸ Along with other missionaries and Christians tied to China, Stuart saw the "loss of China" less in political or ideological terms, and more in spiritual terms. Indeed, one of the main reasons Communism as an ideology was repugnant to Americans was that it

⁴⁶ From here on the use of "China" or "Chinese" refers to the PRC (as opposed to Taiwan/Republic of China) unless specifically noted otherwise.

⁴⁷ Stuart, *Fifty Years in China*, 283.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 285.

was incompatible with Christianity; "godless Communism" had no place in the American world.⁴⁹ The loss of mainland China to "godless communists" struck deep in the hearts of American leaders, many of which had some connection to the missionary network there. The missionaries themselves were "mixed up with gunboats, treaties, trade, governments, and power" throughout the history of Sino-American relations as Christianity played a central role to all American efforts in China.⁵⁰

By 1949 the ability to remake China in an American, capitalist, Christian image seemed to have vanished into the godless void of Communism. The alleged "loss of China" not only had implications for Chinese, it also had implications for the China Hands. John Davies, John Service, Colonel Barrett and others were criticized for their criticism of Chiang's Nationalists and favorable outlook on Mao's Communists. Many others were even accused of being communists themselves. Their realistic approach to China and the Communists clashed with the vision of a Christian China, and even the blatant corruption and moral decay of the Nationalists was not enough to spare them from being a scapegoat for the loss of mainland China. The Korean War that followed would only magnify this treatment and the religious nature of American views on the PRC. The fallout after the loss of China and the entrance of the Chinese People's Volunteer Army (CPVA) into the Korean War smashed any illusions Americans held of a Christian, capitalist China during the Pacific War. In what Gordon H. Chang calls "an epic turn in American attitudes toward China,"⁵¹ the Chinese, now represented by the Communists, were quickly transformed into the Red and Yellow Peril—a godless, cruel threat to the White, Christian West. Outside of the

⁴⁹ See, for example, Stephen Bates' article "'Godless Communism' and its Legacies" for an elaboration on "godless communism" and how it was seen as a threat to be combatted by American Christianity.

⁵⁰ Isaacs, *Scratches on Our Minds*, 206.

⁵¹ Gordon H. Chang, *Fateful Ties: A History of America's Preoccupation with China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015), 170.

Nationalist's small outpost on Taiwan (Republic of China), positive stereotypes of Asians no longer applied to the Chinese; they were instead passed on to America's new Cold War ally, the Japanese. Concomitantly, the negative stereotypes of Asians that were laid heavily upon the Japanese were passed onto the communist Chinese.

The Korean War: The Yellow Peril, Renewed and Retooled

American evangelical Christian writer Dan Gilbert combined race with religion by focusing on the Red and Yellow peril in his book *Red China: The Yellow Peril in Bible Prophecy*. Gilbert sought to warn Americans that the coming Communist Chinese onslaught was part of the end times outlined in the Book of Revelations. His message could not be clearer: "Bible prophecy teaches that the Red advance in Europe will be POWERED FROM OUT OF ASIA [*sic*]." Gilbert framed Communism in clearly religious and racial terms: "Communism is an Asiatic theory of government. It grows out of heathenism and barbarism. Now that the 'yellow peril' has turned *red*, it is a million times the menace that Theodore Roosevelt warned it might become." Gilbert's book is rife with alarmist, racist, and apocalyptic language as it proclaims a dialectical struggle between Christianity and Communism, West and East, White and Yellow. Gilbert warned "the army of 200,000,000 men, described in Revelation, flows forth from the empire of the 'yellow peril'" and would destroy Christianity and Judaism.⁵² Of course, not all Americans shared the hysterical views espoused by Gilbert, but the underlying fear of communist China was undoubtedly a powerful force among American leaders and the public alike. The entrance of the CPVA into the Korean War in the late 1950s quickly unleashed many of the same racial stereotypes upon Chinese that were used for the Japanese in WWII. In 1951, a top-secret memorandum from the Joint Chief of Staffs to Secretary of State Robert Lovett highlighted the "Oriental attitude toward human life" and

⁵² Dan Gilbert, *Red China: The Yellow Peril in Bible Prophecy* (Washington, DC: Evangelist Dan Gilbert, 1951), 71.

"disregard for international conventions and humanitarian considerations." The JCS assumed that Chinese trials for POWs would likely culminate in executions based on "trumped-up charges."⁵³ The CPVA was also said to have employed "human wave tactics"; recklessly throwing away innumerable Chinese lives to overcome their enemy. Historians have debated whether such attacks *actually* occurred, while these attacks were *perceived* and *proclaimed* to have occurred according to the US and the U.N. forces. Thus, the belief among Americans that the Chinese held cavalier views of human life was prevalent during the Korean War and mirrored the American views on the Japanese during the Pacific War.⁵⁴ In the fires of war, old racist traits attributed to Asians were re-forged; the Communist Chinese had become the evil and untrustworthy Oriental once again.

The CPVA, partially made up of former Nationalist soldiers who were often deplored by American generals in China for their weakness during the Pacific War, had suddenly become an effective and lethal fighting force. The humble, pacifist images of Chinese in Pearl Buck's *Good Earth* and the propaganda films like *Here is China* disappeared, and images of Genghis Khan's terrifying Mongol hordes re-emerged. The soldiers fighting against this new enemy were among the first to provide vivid testimonies of the apparent Chinese savagery.

US Lieutenant Colonel Robert B. Rigg published an account of his experiences in combat and as a POW of the CPVA in *Red China's Fighting Hordes: A Realistic Account of the Chinese Communist Army, by a US Army Officer* in 1952. The title alone clearly makes the connection between the Chinese communists and the Mongol hordes of old. His account claims to make

⁵³ *Foreign relations of the United States: diplomatic papers*, 1951, Korea and China, Volume VII, Part I, Lot 55D128: Black Book, Tab 20-A, "Memorandum by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Secretary of Defense (Lovett)" (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1951), 1225-1227.

⁵⁴ The occurrence of mass *seppuku* and *kamikaze* attacks in the final phase of the war lent credence to the belief that Japanese (and Asians) were fanatical and held little value for human life.

“realistic,” objective remarks on how the CPVA operated and conducted warfare, but in reality, it is full of highly racialized language and racist stereotypes. Describing how Chinese soldiers “pitched hand grenades into the trucks and danced and yelled like wild Indians,” Rigg likened the Chinese to the “savages” Americans fought while expanding westward.⁵⁵ He also argued the CPVA used reckless human wave tactics because, “first, it can afford to, and second, a great portion of its officers are lacking in the tactical and strategic skill of modern war.” Despite having “almost unlimited manpower for offense,” Rigg proudly suggested, the Chinese were being “out-generalled.” He further illustrated his belief in the superiority of Americans by claiming Chinese soldiers “can be panicked much easier than the more educated Western soldiers.”⁵⁶ To Rigg and many Americans, the Chinese devalued human life and were racially inferior.

Rigg did not mince words when it came to China’s leaders either; indeed, he was even harsher. He commented Peng Dehuai “looks like something that crawled out from under a log,” labeled Ho Lung a “butcher” who “ruthlessly murdered several missionaries,” described “the savagery with which Chou [En-lai] has turned on the United States,” and claimed Mao Zedong had “a pint jug and is trying to fill it with gallons of blood.” He asserted that Mao’s leadership did not hesitate to “lay down veritable carpets of dead to achieve their aggressive aims.”⁵⁷ Rigg continued by arguing that “Asiatic shows an especial tendency...to be exceedingly brutal and arrogant,” and that Chinese soldiers were taught to hate as the first step in their political education. To Rigg, it was clear: “Of their cruelty, especially against a foreign enemy, I have no doubt.”⁵⁸

In addition to the images of vast, cruel hordes described by those like Rigg, others in the US military were shocked by technical skills and

bravery the Chinese demonstrated only years after looking like a hapless mess. One sergeant supposed “all we had to do was show them our uniforms, and they would run like hell.” Another military official recalled that “I was brought up to think the Chinese couldn’t handle a machine. Now suddenly, the Chinese are flying jets!” This same official even opened up that “I always thought the Yellow Peril business was nonsense...Now I can visualize that Asiatics teamed up with the Slavs could indeed conquer the world!”⁵⁹ The notion of American superiority persisted, but it was being strongly challenged by China’s surprising and, at times, terrifying strength.

The media was also quick to label the danger posed by Red China. *Life* magazine declared “Aggressive China Becomes a Menace” in its November 1950 issue and a *New York Times* article titled “Truman Calls Reds Present-Day Heirs of Mongol Killers” appeared a month later. The latter, written by Paul Kennedy, described how President Truman “called today for a world-wide mobilization to meet what he termed the ‘menace’ of the ‘inheritors of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, who were the greatest murderers in the history of the world.’”⁶⁰ Following Truman’s lead, it was not uncommon for news articles to run headlines such as “Red Hordes Swarm into South Korea.”⁶¹ Such racial imagery was clear to the American public. More than simply an ideological threat, the Chinese aroused the racial fears of the nineteenth-century.⁶²

Mao’s Communists had stolen the spotlight from Chiang’s Nationalists, and the perceptions of mainland Chinese changed accordingly. Although Chiang and the Nationalist Chinese in Taiwan retained American support, it was a reluctant choice by the Americans—they no longer viewed the Nationalist Chinese as the peaceful, brave, or cultured allies prized during WWII. Moreover,

⁵⁵ Lt. Col. Robert B. Rigg, *Red China’s Fighting Hordes: A Realistic Account of the Chinese Communist Army, by a US Army Officer* (Harrisburg, PA: Military Service Publishing Co., 1952), 3.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 5, 12, 9.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 41, 43, 47, 52, 327.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 6, 139.

⁵⁹ Isaacs, *Scratches on Our Minds*, 226-227.

⁶⁰ Paul P. Kennedy, “Truman Calls Reds Present-Day Heirs of Mongol Killers,” *New York Times* (New York), December 24, 1950.

⁶¹ Frank Tremaine, “Red Hordes Swarm into South Korea,” *The Deseret News* (Salt Lake City, UT), April 24, 1951, 1.

⁶² Chang, *Fateful Ties*, 206-207.

with the entrance of the CPVA into the Korean War, Americans believed the mainland Chinese (PRC) had reverted to the cruel, devious, and barbaric “yellow peril” of decades past and transformed into a religious and racial threat to the US.

Conclusion

This paper has shown how American perceptions of China, tinged by racial stereotypes and Christian favoritism, dramatically transformed throughout the 1940s and early 1950s. It should be noted, however, that such a reversal of American opinion is not unique to China. In a mirror image of the Chinese transformation, the Japanese went from demonized enemy to praised ally. Indeed, these two transformations mutually reinforced each other; during WWII the brave, honorable Chinese ally was juxtaposed with the menacing, dishonorable Japanese enemy, but only a few years after the war the Japanese had become an industrious, ingenious pupil under American tutelage while the Chinese had morphed into a cruel, conniving (and communist) enemy. The American support given to Chiang Kai-shek for his Christian and westernized character is not unique to China either. The US support of Syngman Rhee in South Korea, for example, resembles the support of Chiang. Both had strong ties to the United States, both professed to be Christians who believed in democracy, and both ended up as corrupt authoritarian leaders who were still able to maintain US support. There seems to be an American proclivity to support leaders who profess to be Christian and hold Western values, even if those leaders lack legitimacy in their own country and have an ugly track record of corruption, abuse, and less-than-Christian moral leadership.

Nevertheless, the transformation of China from an indispensable ally during the Pacific War to an existential enemy in the Cold War led many Americans to famously question, “who lost China?” – a question that *does* make US-China relations unique. The question assumes that the US had ownership over China in some sense. And beneath this assumption were notions of superiority couched in racial and religious beliefs. The support

of Chiang Kai-shek illustrates how Americans sought to remake China in their image, and the failure of Chiang at the hands of Mao’s Communists was in essence as much of a spiritual defeat as it was an ideological one. The replacement of a Christian leader with a “godless communist” seemingly in league with other powerful godless communists (i.e., the Soviets) was a crushing blow to Henry Luce, John Leighton Stuart, and many Americans who saw the loss of a vast market for both capitalism and Christianity. Understanding how Americans viewed China through a racial and religious lens helps contextualize why the “loss of China” and the emergence of a peril both Red and Yellow was such a shocking turn of events for Americans. As one of the Americans in China whose career was ruined and reputation sullied by the loss of China, John S. Service opined: “while we would certainly have had to give up our paternalistic, missionary attitude of wishing to shape China to our wishes, we might have found co-existence with a stoutly independent, nationalistic Mao Tse-tung not wholly impossible—and the world as a result considerably less complicated.”⁶³ Indeed, US-China relations may have taken a completely different route if not for the religious and racial considerations of US policymakers in the 1940s.

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⁶³ Service, *The Amerasia Papers*, 191.

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