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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures

Changing Perceptions of China in 1930s America

By

Erin Pattison

A thesis presented to the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
degree of Masters of Arts

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Introduction

On December 8, 1941 the following headline dominated the front page of the *New York Times*: “Japan Wars on U.S. and Britain; Makes Sudden Attack on Hawaii; Heavy Fighting At Sea Reported.”¹ Like many of the other daily publications printed in the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor, this edition was not only devoted to the events that had taken place the day before, but it also featured articles detailing the response this attack evoked throughout the United State and the ramifications that would follow. From her posting in Europe, it was the noted foreign news correspondent Anne O’Hare McCormick who observed that the actions taken against the United States by Japan had “done us the service of making the issue clear as light. They have unveiled the face of danger to every American. At last we all see the world as it is, and the war for what it is. The question period is over.”²

The period of equivocation that had largely categorized America’s foreign policy in East Asia throughout much of the 1930s was indeed over. The bombing had not only officially drawn the United States into the Second World War, but it also served to harden the boundary lines between friend and foe. The slowly building sense of anxiety with which many in the United States regarded Japan’s

¹ “Japan Wars on U.S. and Britain; Makes Sudden Attack on Hawaii; Heavy Fighting At Sea Reported,” *New York Times*, December 8, 1941, p.1

² Anne O’Hare McCormick, “For Americans the Question Is Over,” *New York Times*, December 8, 1941, p.22.

military activities since the invasion of Manchuria in September 1931 had solidified into full-blown hatred.

Yet the attack on Pearl Harbor did more than settle the questions surrounding of the United States' relationship with Japan. The possible implications of this development were felt by many in the United States, not least of which were the members of the overseas Chinese communities. In Chicago's Chinatown, amongst the excitement that was generated from the fact that the United States was now at war with their "traditional enemy," the executive secretary of the Chinese merchants association echoed McCormick's sentiments: "now all doubt is ended, the showdown must come...the attack clarified the issues – the problems of the far east will soon be settled."³

That Japan was now the enemy of the United States was perhaps not the only reason for this excitement, for the attack on Pearl Harbor also helped to crystalize the perception of China as an ally and potential equal. This represented a radical transformation of China's image as it was conveyed to the American public. In the chapters that follow, I argue that the representation of China in the American print media was not merely a reflection of the animosity that the bombing aroused. It was an image that had been slowly cultivated over the better course of a decade. While the representation that this process produced was partially shaped by American fears and ambitions, the Chinese were able to guide the way in which it developed by directly engaging with the American government, media outlets, and public.

³ "Chinatown Gay – 'It's Suicide for Japanese,'" *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 3, 1941, pg. 20.

Citing any one of the numerous acts of discrimination against the Chinese that undoubtedly took place after Pearl Harbor, including the federal government's continued enforcement of the Oriental Exclusion Laws, might lead some to question the periodization with which I have framed Sino-American relations in this work. Those who are interested in examining the daily reality of the overseas Chinese living in America or China's position relative to that of the United States' may find that this study's assertions run counter to those reached by other scholars. The aim of this work, however, is not an analysis of the changing nature of the cross-cultural interaction that took place. The focus of this work is the shifting perceptions, specifically the American media's perceptions, of China and its inhabitants, as well as the historical contingencies that allowed this transformation to occur. The "China" that I will examine is not the one that existed in fact, but the one that was constructed in pages of American daily newspapers.

Perception is often at odds with the content of the historical documents on which scholars rely when trying to weave together the threads of past events, but this does not mean that it is any less significant. Books such as John Dower's *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* have already established that images of "the other" can have devastating implications.⁴ Dower examines the way in which images of race influenced the rhetoric and perception of the war in the Pacific and argues that this war was viewed in terms of the preservation of cultural ideals. He also demonstrates the way in which the confluence of the Japanese

⁴ John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).

invasion of Manchuria and the publication of Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth* drew attention to the daily struggle experienced by many in China and cast Japan in an increasingly negative light. This sentiment was then reinforced once the war began through the use of propaganda films, which depicted the brutality of the fighting that was occurring in Asia. Through both print and film, the media reached thousands of individuals in the United States, helping to further promote the American war effort.

In the years leading up to the United States' entrance into World War II, the image of China was similarly affected by the American media, but on a much more pervasive and wide-reaching scale. One of the most influential individuals to help the transformation of the image of China was media tycoon Henry R. Luce. The son of a Christian missionary to China, Henry Luce spent a portion of his childhood in the coastal Chinese city of Qingdao. His early experiences in China informed his image of the country, and through the incredible influence of his media empire, first in print with the publications of *Time*, *Fortune*, and *Life*, and then with the incorporation of the radio broadcast "The March of Time," Luce was able to expound his impressions of the Chinese. He became, as Patricia Neils aptly refers to him, a "China image-maker."⁵ The image he created has been widely studied by scholars such as T. Christopher Jespersen, who argues that the representation of China that Luce disseminated to the public reflected his belief that China would one day resemble the United States; when events failed to bear out his assumptions, Jespersen asserts, Luce attempted to alter American policy by misrepresenting

⁵ Patricia Neils, *China Images in the Life and Times of Henry Luce* (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1990), p. 14.

China to the American people.⁶ By 1931 the creation of Luce's colorful image of China was already underway, yet the dominate image that appeared in the vast majority of the daily American publications was that of an alien culture. Much of the commentary surrounding China often built upon the familiar rhetoric that had long roots in the pre-Exclusion Era debates. That the representations constructed by journalists and foreign correspondents who operated outside of the traditional missionary circles were so contrary to the image of the harmonious Sino-American relationship put forth by Luce lends credence to Jespersen's argument regarding Luce's highly distorted view of China.

As insightful as Jespersen study is, it fails to highlight the limits of influence wielded by major historical figures, which is readily discernable when the images produced by Luce's publications are compared with the images constructed by publications not affiliated with his media empire.⁷ While these two representations began to merge as the decade progressed and the differences between them became less pronounced, they never matched in their entirety, for the images presented in daily newspapers were the result of a combination of American aspirations and the increased influence of the Chinese Nationalist government, the Chinese literary community, and overseas Chinese community on the image of their country and culture.

⁶ T. Christopher Jespersen, *American Images of China: 1931-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 23.

⁷ Jespersen's field of reference is limited to the contributions made by well-known figures such as Henry Luce, Soong Meiling, and Pearl S. Buck or by organizations like United China Relief. It does not provide for an analysis of the ways in which the members of the overseas Chinese community in the United States or interactions between Chinese and Americans not affiliated with missionary agencies helped to influence the construction of China's image in the American media.

In an effort to demonstrate the way in which the transformation of the American media's image of China was contingent upon both the larger historical events at play and the ability of the Chinese to influence their own representation, I have divided this thesis into 4 chapters. Chapter 1 examines the image of China as it was depicted at the beginning of the 1930s, demonstrating that this deeply rooted image was highly consistent and did not change without being subjected to a significant shift in American perceptions of both national and international affairs. Chapter 2 highlights the way in which the political and economic concerns in the United States led to a reevaluation of American relationships with East Asian countries, thereby providing an opportunity for well-placed members of the Chinese community to help reconfigure the way in which the image of China was depicted. Finally, chapters 3 and 4 demonstrate the manner in which the Chinese were able to guide this transformation process in ways that were advantageous to their goals. Through the publication of novels and articles written by the Chinese, and through the changing characterization of interactions between the Chinese living in the United States and other segments of the American population, the Chinese were able to promote nonthreatening aspects of their culture and customs to the American public. This allowed many in the United States to engage with Chinese culture instead of merely relegating the Chinese living in the United States to the position of foreign nationals living within the confines of the alien atmospheres in Chinatowns across the country.

Chapter 1: The Historical Image of China in the American Media

Before the Chinese began arriving in the United States in significant numbers in the mid to late 1800s, an image of China and the Chinese had already begun to take hold as a result of the writings of Westerners living and working in China. While the stationing of career military men such as Frederick Townsend Ward in China to protect American foreign and economic interests helped perpetuate the notion that China was militarily and technologically inferior to the West, it was perhaps those individuals who traveled to China with the intent of helping the Chinese become a modern, Christian nation who had the most enduring impact on the notion of the Chinese as an innately inferior race.⁸ While scholars such as Ruth Rogaski have demonstrated the manner in which concepts such as hygiene were deployed in an effort to aid the imperialistic agendas of the foreign countries that sought to establish permanent bases of power in China, others such as Larrissa Heinrich have shown that this image of a weakened, diseased Chinese body, which was transmitted through text and by means of portraits commissioned by the likes of missionaries such as Peter Parker, was transferred back to an American

⁸ For further information concerning Westerners in China see Jonathan Spence, *To Change China: Western Advisers in China 1620-1960* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969).

audience in an effort to gain the funding necessary to continue their medical and religious work in Asia.⁹

As this transmission and translation of the image of a weak, alien China was slowly filtering over to the United States, the construction of the transcontinental railroad began introducing Chinese laborers to the United States in record numbers. This allowed for the exposure of more Americans to many distinctive elements within Chinese culture. Chinatowns sprang up in numerous cities throughout the country, and these locales served as the focal point for many of the debates concerning the suppression of Chinese immigration to the United States that would emerge prior to the issuance of the Exclusion Act in 1882. This increased exposure helped to color the images of China and the Chinese that were conjured in the minds of residents and lawmakers and in the media. These representations that were constructed during the latter portion of the nineteenth century were remarkably enduring. They became a legacy that continued into the early 1930s, recycling for nearly half a century the same issues of concern Americans had with regard the Chinese.

The article, "It's Peculiar, the Ways of These Chinese," which was published in January 1931, demonstrates the significant influence the themes created in the late

⁹ Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). Larissa N. Heinrich, *The Afterlife of Images: Translating the Pathological Body between China and the West* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

1800s continued to hold at the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁰ Preceding the body of this article appeared the following:

Which I wish to remark –
And my language is plain –
That for ways that are dark,
And for tricks that are vain,
The heathen Chinese is peculiar.

This verse, which was taken from a stanza of the poem “Plain Language from Truthful James,” drew upon the extended history that this work had accumulated since its original publication in the California-based *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* in 1870 by the American author Bret Harte.¹¹ Although this poem was written as a satire of the anti-Chinese sentiment that Harte saw gaining momentum in California, upon publication the intended tone of this work was largely stripped away. The satire was “so restrained” that it escaped detection by many, including “the politician most vehemently opposed to the admission of Chinese labor;” for it was said that this official had “written Mr. Harte, when his ballad was first published, to thank him for it, writing, of course, under the impression that the ballad was a new and powerful blow struck on his own side of the question.”¹²

¹⁰ “It’s Peculiar, the Ways of These Chinese,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 19, 1931, p. 1.

¹¹ F. Bret Harte, “Plain Language from Truthful James,” *Overland Monthly and Out West* magazine, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1870), p. 287-288. The author’s full name, Francis Bret Harte, was rarely used. In most of his publications, Harte was often credited as F. Bret Harte or Bret Harte. For purposes of simplification, I have used the name Bret Harte in all instances in which I have referred to this author or his work.

Whether this exchange actually occurred is of less importance than the manner in which this poem was received and utilized by the media. After its initial publication, "Plain Language from Truthful James," frequently published under the title "The Heathen Chinee," appeared in such publications as *Prairie Farmer* and *Saturday Evening Post*; illustrated editions followed shortly, providing for a visual distinction between the Chinese and Western characters to be dispersed throughout the United States.¹³ The popularity of this poem remained even after the Exclusion Act was enacted, for it continued to appear in newspapers and magazines throughout the country well into the twentieth century.¹⁴ While this poem was frequently printed without additional commentary, making it difficult to determine how it was received or interpreted by contemporary audiences, in some publications, such as the 1931 article cited above, the manner in which this stanza of the poem is situated within the text lends itself to the perpetuation of the image

¹² "The author of "That Heathen Chinee," *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature*, Vol. 10, No. 6 (1871), p. 752. The "official" cited by the author of this article is not explicitly named. The anti-Chinese sentiments that were held by many of the officials in municipal, state, and federal governments were not particularly uncommon, and while some individuals were more renowned for their opposition to continued Chinese migration to the United States than others, the person to whom the author referred is speculative.

¹³ This poem was published under the title "Plain Language from Truthful James" in *Prairie Farmer*, Vol. 41, No. 36 (1870), p. 187 and in *Saturday Evening Post* in two separate editions: September 10, 1870, p. 3 and February 11, 1871, p. 4. It appeared under the title "The Heathen Chinee" in two illustrated, paperback editions: (Boston: James R. Osgood & Co., 1871), and (Chicago: Western News Company, 1870).

¹⁴ The list of publications that follows is not intended to serve as a complete record of the appearance of the poem originally entitled "Plain Language from Truthful James." It is merely meant to demonstrate the extent to which this poem was dispersed throughout the United States over an extended period of time: "The Heathen Chinee," *The Morning Call*, (San Francisco, CA) May 28, 1893, p. 17; "Plain Language from Truthful James," *Richmond Dispatch* (Richmond, VA) April 27, 1902, p. 6; "The Heathen Chinee," *The Washington Times* (Washington D.C.) October 10, 1913, p. 6.

created in the nineteenth century of the Chinese as belonging to an alien culture.

Following the verse taken from Harte's poem appears a depiction from the

Chinatown in Chicago:

A couple of joss sticks sputtered last night before the old Hong Ming Lak's complacent little Buddha, sitting with legs crossed tailor fashion in front of his miniature temple. At the crook of his knees stood the votive offering of samshu wine and rice and lichi nuts. The Buddha occupied the top of a rickety teakwood table in a corner of the rear room at 216 West 22nd street, where Hong Ming Lak, 66 years old, lived. In the front was his grocery, where you might choose jerked pork, dried sea slugs, roots of lotus lily, and imported tea...Hong Ming Lak has been there as long as the neighbors could remember. They liked him, but they couldn't understand him. He seemed to be unable to become Americanized. He would sit for hours in his shop studying a flower, and of [sic] a pleasant summer evening he would carry his bird from the end of a short stick, for a walk around the block...'A nut,' the neighbors said.¹⁵

Gone from this article is the critique of Western rhetoric regarding the Chinese that provided the fodder for Harte's satirical creation; all that remains is a report on the peculiarities of Chinese customs.

Like the poem from which the title and verse of "It's Peculiar, the Ways of These Chinese" is derived, the oddities that this article cites are also largely inherited from the pre-Exclusion Era. One of the most frequently voiced objections to Chinese immigration during this era was the apparent unwillingness of the Chinese to adopt the customs and social etiquette that existed throughout the United States. One depiction of the Chinese published in 1873 resonates quite strongly with that provided of Hong Ming Lak in 1931:

The Chinese on the other hand [in contrast to other immigrant populations], always remain the same: no time seems to efface the

¹⁵ "It's Peculiar, the Ways of These Chinese," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 19, 1931, p.1.

memories which they cherish of their own land, and no contact with American life can alienate them from the peculiar vices, habits, and customs of the Celestial Empire. Although brought into daily intercourse with the English-speaking population of the country, they never learn the language fluently, and to-day there is scarcely one Chinese in New-York who can hold the most ordinary conversation in English.¹⁶

Alien in appearance, this is how the Chinese were portrayed in American media outlets. While this may have been reason enough for some to question continued Chinese migration to the United States, the potential threats that were cited as stemming from activities and social practices associated with the Chinese heightened the degree of force with which police and local government responded to matters regarding Chinese inhabitants. One article published in February 1931 depicts the need for equipment such as “fire apparatus, an airplane, portable spotlights and the ringing blows of axes and pikes on solid doors,” as necessary when conducting “a raid on sixteen houses in Newark’s Chinatown...when fifty Federal narcotic agents took 163 prisoners and seized opium valued at \$5,000 and opium layouts valued at \$50,000;” when further describing the environment in which the raid took place, the taint associated with Chinatown is made evident, for the article continues by describing “Mulberry Arcade [which served as an artery through the Chinatown in Newark] is an alley of unpainted shops with cryptic Chinese lettering on their unwashed windows, a little street dark with discolored and tattered awnings, dim lights and heavy, foreign odors.”¹⁷

¹⁶ “Chinese in New York: How They Live and Where,” *New York Times*, December 26, 1873, p.3.

¹⁷ “163 Chinese Seized in 16 Opium Raids,” *New York Times*, February 3, 1931, p. 16.

That the sights and smells associated with Chinese enclaves were being targeted as problematic and hazardous was hardly new or surprising. Concerns with regard to public health had long been cited as one of the primary reasons for further legal action against Chinese migration. In the spring of 1880, for example, members of the San Francisco Board of Health toured the Chinese quarter in their city, giving the following review:

Near the entrance to this underground den there are large waste pipes running from the water-closets and sinks of the building above ground, which empty into open wooden boxes above the sewer, and the mass of filth is so great that the sewer is frequently choked and the troughs run over...Filth of this and every other description is everywhere patent to the senses both of sight and smell.¹⁸

While it is important to note that some contemporaries of this period expressed doubts as to the veracity of the statements given by the Board of Health condemning the Chinese inhabitants, the image that was projected by the Board's findings had powerful ramifications with regard to the perception of the Chinese. Laws were issued at every level of government intent on curbing potential health hazards, and the disputes that these legal regulations engendered gained considerable notoriety due to wide media coverage, further enflaming the debates surrounding anti-Chinese legislation. The case brought against the Sheriff Matthew Nunuan by Ho Ah Kow in San Francisco is an example of one such dispute. This case, which was picked up by publications in multiple cities, detailed the enforcement of the Cubic Air Ordinance, which according to the *New York Times* "was enacted for the purpose of preventing the Chinese who usually congregate in

¹⁸ Isaac Kalloch, Workingmen's Party of California, Anti-Chinese Council, Investigating Committee, and the San Francisco Board of Health, "Chinatown Declared a Nuisance!" (San Francisco, 1880), p. 3.

large numbers, from poisoning themselves by imperfect ventilation;" the *Chicago Daily Tribune* goes on to state that:

Ho Ah Kow was a peaceable Chinaman, whose sin against the Commonwealth of San Francisco was his disinclination to occupy as much space in his sleeping apartments as a Christian. Ho and his comrades packed themselves in their dormitory like sardines in a box. This practice was regarded by the Supervisors as detrimental to the sanitary conditions of the city.¹⁹

In addition to the threat posed to Americans' physical wellbeing through exposure to the health risks associated with the Chinese and their social practices, the concern regarding the Chinese inhabitants' lack of morale fortitude was never lagging far behind. Accounts describing Chinese migrants' moral destitution were as longstanding and pervasive as those detailing their perceived physical inferiorities. When interviewed, the owner of a Louisiana plantation remarked that Chinese workers "get all they can out of their employer, and give him as little in return...they are the keenest cheats in the world, and cunning in making bargains and in obtaining advantages;" he concludes that "they are utterly destitute of moral honesty, and have not the least sense of justice in their natures."²⁰ The 1931 headline, "In China Also the Racketeer Thrives: He May Be Magistrate, He May Be Militarist, but Whatever His Calling He Knows How to Extort Money Easily," gives

¹⁹ "The Tale of a Chinaman," *New York Times*, July 16, 1879, p. 4; "The Tale of a Chinaman," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 15, 1879, p. 4. Although these articles were printed under the same title, the articles are not identical.

²⁰ "Chinamen in Louisiana: An Unfavorable Report of the Results of the Experiment," *New York Times*, October 7, 1871, p. 11.

strong indication that this notion of a morally corrupt Chinese population was still in wide circulation in the early 1930s.²¹

The image of China at the beginning of the 1930s echoed that which had been constructed during the wave of anti-Chinese sentiment prior to the issuance of the Exclusion Act, in which the Chinese were not only depicted as distinctly different, but also dangerous. However, as with any examination of broader trends or currents within a given society, there are examples that run counter to this depiction of China as odd or backward. Some articles that appeared in the American media in 1931 pointed to a Chinese society, whether in China or in the United States, which was slowly progressing toward Western conceptions of modernity. For example, articles cited such occurrences as the incorporation of Westernized business practices by prominent members of the Chinese community in cities in the United States and the official adoption of the Gregorian calendar by the Chinese National Government. However, these articles were often qualified with statements of only partial success or instances in which the antiquated societal norms of “old China” persisted.²² The “stubbornness” of the Chinese is depicted in an article that details continued use of the lunar calendar. As reported by a foreign correspondent to the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, the Chinese law “forbidding the printing of calendars according to the old lunar system has failed to prevent the continued use of that

²¹ James W. Bennett, “In China Also the Racketeer Thrives: He May Be Magistrate, He May Be Militarist, but Whatever His Calling He Knows How to Extort Money Easily,” *New York Times*, January 25, 1931, p. SM6.

²² Charles Daily, “Chinese Try Out New Calendar, But Retain Old: Refuse to Forego Fetes Held for Centuries,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 2, 1931, p. 22. Bennett, James O’Donnell, “Chinatown – It’s Queer Mixture of Old and New: Splendor, Seediness, Thrift, Wisdom,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 20, 1931, p. 1.

system or the celebration of the Chinese New Year as it has been observed for thousands of years;” in an effort to maintain traditional Chinese celebrations, Chinese families purchase “calendars printed according to the Gregorian reckoning and then write in the corresponding lunar dates. As before, they have marked the advent of the new year by abstaining from work, visiting friends, paying debts, and setting off firecrackers.”²³

In the beginning of the 1930s the image of China and the Chinese that was presented to the American public in the print media was largely a vestige of pre-Exclusion Era rhetoric that overwhelmingly depicted the Chinese in a less than positive light. The consistency with which this image was deployed in U.S. newspapers, despite the sweeping political reforms that had taken place in China since this representation emerged, indicates that this image was incredibly resistant to outside influence. As the next chapter will show, it was only when the emergence of new American political and economic concerns were combined with the repositioning of the United States on the international stage that the image of China was able to change as well.

²³ “China’s Bootleg Calendar,” *New York Times*, May 3, 1931, SM11.

Chapter 2: The Conditions of Change

America in the early 1930s was rife with political and economic change. The stock market crash in October of 1929 heralded the beginning of what would become one of the worst periods of economic performance in modern history. Yet this was not an event isolated to the United States. The Great Depression and the devastating effects it created for many Americans was tied to a larger global phenomenon that demanded the attention of governments the world over. Political crises, both within individual countries and between separate nation-states, soon followed. While war would prove to be the end result for many of the conflicts that began in the early years of this decade, other rivalries only came about after the economic and political issues of the day forced countries to reevaluate their positions within the international community. For the United States, this process resulted in a reconfiguration of American interests in East Asia, and it allowed for the development of representations to emerge that corresponded to these shifting international perceptions.

By the start of 1931 the global economic decline that had begun only fifteen months earlier was already having a dramatic affect on the country. The strain it imposed prompted many, both within the federal government and within private enterprise, to aggressively seek out opportunities that could help alleviate the fiscal problems facing the nation. China, with its massive population of potential consumers, soon became a beacon for those who sought to buoy the faltering

American economy with international trade. Some argued that regardless of the immediate risks such an endeavor might entail, the financial prospects that “the China of tomorrow” might afford refocused American attention to the matter of enabling China to make such investments.²⁴ One solution that was frequently discussed by economic leaders and political commentators in 1931 was a loan of silver dollars to China, which was considered in the hopes of “aiding the Chinese to buy wheat and build roads, thus stimulating automobile imports and generally relieving the economic depression in the West.”²⁵

Others, however, were far more cautious with regard to possible dealings with the Nationalist government. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, the way in which the image of China was constructed in the American print media during the early 1930s largely stemmed from the anti-Chinese rhetoric that emerged out of the pre-Exclusion Era debates. Despite the rapid succession of political and social changes within China itself, including the fall of the old dynastic order, members of the American government continued to regard the succeeding Nationalist government in much the same way as they had the Qing Dynasty. In many respects, the Nationalist government was not considered any more modern or forward thinking than its predecessors, and reports concerning the backwards and dangerous nature of this government remained a staple element within the depiction of China that was portrayed to the American public. The article, “Foreign Medical Aid Attacked in Hankow: Official Newspaper Charges Move to Subjugate the

²⁴ “Shall We Sell to China?” *Wall Street Journal*, August 21, 1931, p. 8.

²⁵ Clarence K. Streit, “China Asks the Aid of League Experts,” *New York Times*, January 13, 1931, p. 8.

Chinese by Killing or Crippling Them,” is an example of this type of narrative, for it demonstrates that such attacks appeared to take place with the consent of the government; in this article, the journalist reports that “repeated and vitriolic attacks on foreign doctors and hospitals, published in Hankow in the *Chung Shan Pao*, the official Kuomintang newspaper of the great river port, has caused great uneasiness to foreigners, for the attacks seem to be officially inspired and are of decidedly political nature.”²⁶

The rhetoric that contributed to the production of China’s image, while retaining its previous form, also expanded to allow for the inclusion of a new element of growing concern: the fear of communism. In January 1931, well before the Chinese Communist Party’s 1949 rise to power and the advent of the Cold War, the Fish Report, a summary of the findings of a House Committee convened in 1930 to investigate communist activity in the United States, concluded that “500,000 to 600,000 Communists organized under leaders in twenty divisions of this country, with headquarters in New York City directed from Moscow;” coverage of the report cited that these communists “were agitating for the overthrow of the American political and economic systems.”²⁷ Scholars of the political history between the United States and East Asia during this era, such as Warren Cohen, have argued that whereas many Americans were sympathetic toward the Chinese after the commencement of the successive waves of Japanese invasion that would take place

²⁶ “Foreign Medical Aid Attacked in Hankow: Official Newspapers Charges Move to Subjugate the Chinese by Killing or Crippling Them,” *New York Times*, January 11, 1931, p. 56.

²⁷ “Fish Report Asks Outlawing of Reds as National Menace,” *New York Times*, January 18, 1931, p. 1.

throughout the decade, their focus on the crises unfolding in the United States after the start of the Great Depression prevented them from worrying about China.²⁸ While it is true that China was not the foremost concern for the majority of the American public, the economic potential of Chinese markets did mean that the federal government and prominent members of the economic community had a vested interest in China. In tying communist plots to an already battered economic and political atmosphere, elected officials further distorted an already highly colored image of China, which was then reinforced when reports such as “Bandit-Red Menace Stirs Central China” and “World Warned to Aid China ‘Or She’ll Go Red” found their way into American newspapers.²⁹

These concerns pertaining to the threat of communism often filtered back into the discourse surrounding the dangers Americans associated with the Nationalist government, China’s ineffectual military, and the recognized Chinese leaders’ perceived inability to combat the communists in their own backyard. In an article written in late January of 1931, for example, foreign correspondent Hallett Abend reported on “the inability of the Nanking Government to raise sufficient funds for the disbandment and reorganization of the armies in the North had brought about a threatening situation in Shansi Province.”³⁰ One cause cited for the

²⁸ Warren Cohen, “American Leaders and East Asia, 1931-1938,” in Akira Iriye and Warren Cohen, ed., *American, Chinese, and Japanese Perspectives on Wartime Asia: 1931-1949* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1990), p. 14.

²⁹ Hallett Abend, “Bandit-Red Menace Stirs Central China,” *New York Times*, January 11, 1931, p. 60. “Chinese Troops Mutiny; Refuse to Attack Reds,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 10, 1931, p. 7. John Powell, “World Warned to Aid China ‘Or She’ll Go Red,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 3, 1931, p. 9.

³⁰ Hallett Abend, “New Disaffections Threaten Nanking,” *New York Times*, January 27, 1931, p. 7.

chaos depicted was the “deplorable” condition of the soldiers, for “hundreds of them were frozen to death in January. The commanders urge that their forces be reorganized as an entity within the national defense armies, claiming that disbandment would merely be creating brigands and Communists. They say that seditious communistic pamphlets have been disseminated in Taiyuanfu.”

In the early years of the 1930s concerns surrounding the nature of the Chinese Nationalist government, communism, and the effects of the global economic depression were woven together in such a way that it became difficult to discuss Sino-American relations without also addressing the uncertainties that many associated with both China’s ruling government and the communist forces that not only threatened Chinese sovereignty, but also the funds or economic interests the United States might establish in China. In 1931 the director of the International Institute of Teachers College at Columbia University and head of the China Foundation, Professor Paul Monroe, submitted a proposal to the State Department regarding U.S. interests in China that demonstrates the way in which these issues were often depicted as interrelated:

Unless something constructive is done soon China will dissolve into mass of communistic excesses, possessing none of the constructive elements existing within the Russian situation. The one thing that will prevent this is a strong central government with a constructive program, which is impossible unless the militaristic factions are eliminated and the armies are demobilized. This is impossible without at the same time increasing banditry and communism unless the demobilized soldiers are given employment. This is impossible unless large public works employing tens of thousands of men, are undertaken, such enterprises as great railroad lines, systems of motor

roads, river drainage systems, canal systems and dock systems. All of this is impossible without large funds from abroad.³¹

China and the potential it had to boost the struggling economy of the United States certainly drew the attention of many in America, but U.S. interests in East Asia were in no way limited to China. The role played by Japan was critical to the successful outcome of many of the strategic plans government officials drew up with regard to American engagement in China at the beginning of the 1930s. Instead of weighing the pros and cons between potential gains and liabilities as in the case of China, Japan was viewed as a part of the solution to the unfolding political and economic crises. In talks surrounding the economic intervention in China and the stabilization of the price of silver, the perception of Japan's position relative to that of the other nation-states becomes evident. No one country, it was argued, could "do the job alone. Even the self-sufficient Senate of the United States is aware that England and France and Japan must be drawn into the affair, if it is to be put in the way of success."³²

The importance of Japan and the role it might play prompted some policy advisors, like the former Governor of Hawaii, Wallace Rider Farrington, to go so far as to advocate for a limited lift on the ban on Asian immigration in the United States, asserting that 100 Chinese and between 150 to 200 Japanese should be allowed to migrate to the United States in order to build goodwill. It is telling that Farrington's

³¹ The China Foundation was tasked with administering the Boxer indemnity funds that were remitted to China by Congress in 1924; Hallett Abend, "Urges Loan to China from Reparations," *New York Times*, February 2, 1931.

³² "Helping China," *New York Times*, January 9, 1931, p. 19.

analysis of the “Oriental situation,” both with regard to the issue of immigration and the integration within the U.S. population, places far greater weight on the inclusion of the Japanese than it does on the inclusion of the Chinese. While Sino-American relations might have been precarious, the United States position relative to Japan was on much firmer ground, causing Farrington to scoff at the possibility of a war being declared between these two countries. Such a scenario was “too utterly silly to even think about,” he remarked, since “from the economic standpoint, we are Japan’s best customer; Japan has everything to gain though peace.”³³

While these political ties forged between Japan and the United States might have been viewed by some in America as a reliable source of support for the economic plans the U.S. had in China at the start of the 1930s, the incident at Mukden on September 18, 1931 set the stage for the dramatic rift that would develop between the United States and Japan. An explosion near a railway line owned by Japan’s South Manchuria Railway was used as justification for the occupation of Manchuria by the Japanese military. This shift in America’s perception of its position via the countries in East Asia was not immediate. On the contrary, the United States was quite ambivalent about proceeding in a manner that might jeopardize its standing with the Japanese government. Reporting on America’s response to the actions taken by Japan against the Chinese, journalist Charles Daily, the *Chicago Daily Tribune’s* foreign correspondent in China, writes:

Thus far the state department has been following a cautious policy, due to its desire not to take a premature action which would embarrass the Japanese cabinet in its discussions of developments in Manchuria. Apparently it is felt also that should the Kellogg pact be

³³ “Urges Lifting Ban Against Orientals,” *New York Times*, April 24, 1931, p. 17.

invoked, the Japanese might construe this action as an attempt on the part of this country to place blame upon the Japanese government for aggression in Manchuria.³⁴

As the condemnation of Japan's actions grew, however, the relationship between the United States and Japan deteriorated. By February 1933, just one month before Japan quit the League of Nations, reports depicting engagements between America and Japan became so acrimonious that the Japanese delegate to the League of Nations, stated that "American partisanship in favor of China has been too obvious for too long a time;" he went on to accuse the U.S. of condoning "the faults and failures of China in spite of their colossal character and you have magnified ours."³⁵

Coverage of the Mukden Incident and of the ever-worsening condition of Japanese-American relations was extensive. While many of those who followed the development of these events through the articles printed in American newspapers might well have focused on the immediate problems that could arise between these two countries, others likely looked to the events that played out in the American media for what they might mean for other countries. The Nationalist government and members of the overseas Chinese communities living in the United States were two particularly well-placed groups that recognized the possible consequences the shift in Japanese-American relations might engender and how these consequences might be advantageous to China's position and goals in East Asia.

³⁴ The signatories of the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 stipulated to the renunciation of war as a means of national policy. Charles Daily, "Chinese Ask U.S. to Intervene in Manchurian Row," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 22, 1931, p.5

³⁵ "Japanese Envoy Lays Blame of U.S. for Censure by League," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 28, 1933, p. 4.

The Nationalist government was acutely aware of the way in which the American media portrayed events that occurred in East Asia, and it took great measures to maintain a positive image of itself. The seriousness with which the Nationalist government regarded this issue is illustrated through its attempted deportation of the *New York Times'* foreign correspondent in 1931 for publishing an article that portrayed the Nationalist government in a less than favorable light. When commenting on this situation, the Guomin News Agency stated that the Nationalist government "maintains that its demand for the deportation of the *New York Times* correspondent was justified by Mr. Abend's false and malicious reports," and "agreed to restore his status and accord him the usual press facilities only after it had been led to believe in the sincerity of the *New York Times'* expression of regret."³⁶

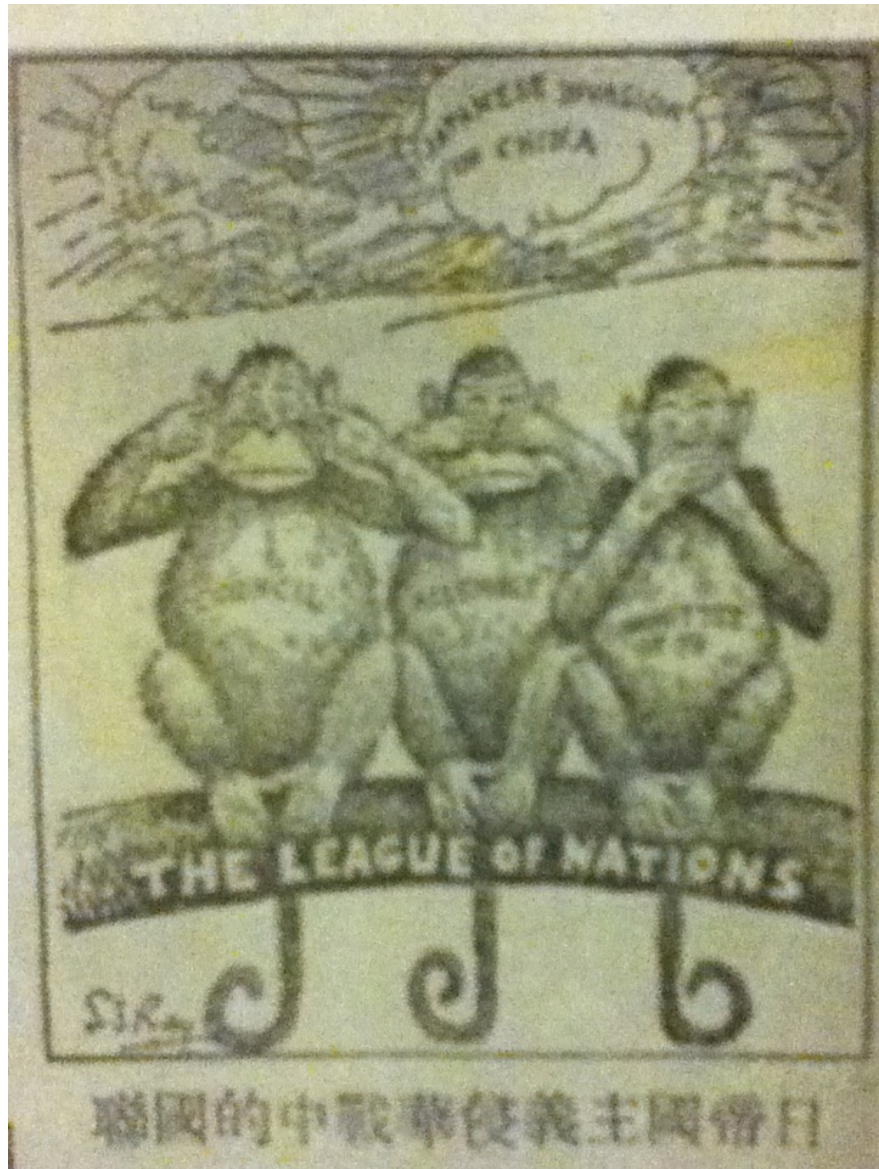
The ruling government had the means of monitoring the way in which it was portrayed in the American media through its representative in the U.S. and through restrictions placed on telegrams leaving China by requiring telegram and cable messages to be issued with official stamps by governmental censors. This did not stop the flow of money and information between China and the United States, however, for this continued exchange has been well documented. Many scholars who study the connections that were formed between the Chinese diaspora and China have focused on the way in which those living abroad maintained relationships with individuals and associations based in China. Madeline Hsu's examination of the migration of Taishanese men to the United States, for example, studies the trans-

³⁶ "Holds To Stand on Abend: Nanking Calls Attitude on Times Correspondent Justified, *New York Times*, May 21, 1931, p.6.

Pacific relationships that were developed between the migrants working in the United States with their families and native place, and in his study of the Chinese migration networks, Adam McKeown demonstrates the “grooves” that Chinese migration to distinct location such as Peru, Hawaii, and Chicago created.³⁷ Yet this information that flowed between the United States and China was not limited to the financial dealings or social interactions that might affect one location. The way in which China and the Chinese were portrayed by the American media also filtered over to China, and while it is hard to determine the degree to which this type of information was disseminated in China, the inclusion of one political cartoon depicting the League of Nations’ initial lackluster response to Japan’s military actions against China in a Chinese reader does demonstrate that this type of information extended beyond elite government circles.³⁸

³⁷ Madeline Yuan-yin Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration between the United States and South China, 1882-1943*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Adam McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change: Peru, Chicago, and Hawaii, 1900-1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

³⁸ S.J. Ray, political cartoon, reprinted as “國際漫畫：美國喊維持國際條約時的日帝國主義， in 讀書中學, 1933, 1 (3).



The transmission of information between the United States and China armed the Nationalist government, those members of Chinese society who were well versed in international affairs, and the overseas Chinese community with the information necessary in determining the political temperature in the United States and the current state of American perception of the Chinese. By gaging the condition of U.S. economic and political concerns, these three groups of Chinese

were able to reposition themselves in relation to the United States and help shift the way in which the image of China was presented in the American media.

Chapter 3: The Shift in Discourse

The image of China and the Chinese that was carried into the 1930s by the American media, despite its long history and remarkable resistance to change, began to bow under the pressure it sustained from the shifting economic and political concerns that were taking place within the United States. While the way in which the image of China was constructed did not immediately change, the economic potential of Chinese markets and the fear of communism introduced new discourses concerning the nature and condition of China and its culture. During the first few years of the decade, the shifting nature of the America's concerns was reflected in the ambivalent manner in which China was portrayed by the American media, in which major publications ran articles containing both old and new styles of rhetoric. As the decade progressed, and relations between the United States and Japan became more acrimonious, new voices entered into the discussion regarding America's position with regard to East Asia. Several of these voices were Chinese in origin. In this chapter I will examine the new cultural and political perspectives that emerged by the end of the decade and the ways in which these representations contended with the image of China that had been so dominant in the United States for over half a century.

While at the beginning of the 1930s the American media continued to feature articles depicting the Chinese as odd or backwards, other reports featured new

rhetoric that depicted Chinese society in novel ways. The positive shift in the tone with which many of the articles pertaining to China were written is perhaps one of the first indications that the representation of China was undergoing a process of transformation. While the content of the articles that employed this tonal shift was often quite similar to the reports that more closely followed that well-established image with which the American public had become so familiar, these new formats often presented the material in a manner that provides the reader with different implications for Chinese society.

Illiteracy is one topic that allows for a comparison between these two types of articles. This was not an emerging problem in China, nor was it an issue that had previously failed to capture the attention of the Western missionaries and officials who played a significant role in the creation of the image of China. Along with proper sanitation, medical practices, and Christianity, illiteracy was a problem that often served as a benchmark for the progress (or lack there of) that Chinese society had made. The newspaper article “Chinese Youth Illiterate,” which was printed in May of 1931, continued in this vein.³⁹ This article reports that only 11,000 of the 130,000 school-aged children in Beijing could read and write. It is a statistic that points to the existence of an even greater problem facing China as a whole, since this “report is not characteristic of the illiteracy and the school problem in China. Peiping has for centuries been the principal seat of Chinese culture and learning,

³⁹ “Chinese Youth Illiterate,” *New York Times*, May 3, 1931, p. E8.

and has far more schools, in relation to the population, than any other cities except the great treaty ports like Shanghai, Canton, Tientsin, and Hankow.”⁴⁰

The way in which illiteracy is presented in the February 1931 article “Yale’s Yen Charts a Course for China,” however, approached the problem of illiteracy from the perspective of Y.C. James Yen. Yen, a Yale graduate who created a textbook designed to introduce students to basic Chinese characters, contended that “the Chinese people had to learn to read and write if they were to fit themselves for modern democratic government;” in an effort to raise the literacy rate in China, only two years after returning to his home country, “Yen launched his campaign [to education the masses], but he did it with all the technique of the best American ‘drives,’ together with most of the paraphernalia of American revivalism.”⁴¹ Despite this article’s depiction of a rampant illiteracy problem in China, the manner in which this issue is portrayed deviates significantly from the article examined above, which would be published only three months later. While “Chinese Youth Illiterate” merely demonstrates the extent of the problems associated with China, which is consistent with its pre-Exclusion Era image, “Yale’s Yen Charts a Course for China” focuses not only on the problem, but also on the emergence of a possible solution that originates from within the Chinese population.

Many of the articles that follow the trajectory of highlighting Chinese flaws while providing the corresponding positive actions that were taking place in China in an effort to affect change carried over from the social realm to the political realm,

⁴⁰ During the period in which this article was written, the city of Beijing, or Peiking when romanized using the Wade-Giles system, was referred to as Peiping.

⁴¹ Nathaniel Peffer, “Yale’s Yen Charts a Course for China,” *New York Times*, February 1, 1931, p. 81.

leading commentators to posit the ways in which the abrogation of outdated Chinese cultural norms would benefit China's internal development and its positioning on the world stage. In an interview from 1931, for example, noted author Lin Yutang states: "Not until everybody loses face in China, will this country ever become a democratic nation...When no citizen of this country has 'face,' then it will be possible and fair to ask all the foreigners in China to lose face also, which means the abolition of special privilege and extraterritoriality."⁴² Like the more positive tonal shift with which implications for the developments within the social realm in China were depicted, the rhetoric used to frame the political situation in China portrayed to the American public a country that was in the process of becoming something better. While many in America believed that China had not yet reached the same level of development as the United States, articles did report that "China's inchoate hoards are beginning to stir, to act, to live – not as a docile mass [that Confucianism engendered] but as individuals."⁴³ However slowly it may have been occurring, newspaper headlines portrayed that "China Travels the Road to Modernity: From Their Centuries-Old Thoughts and Traditions, Her People are Turning to Western Ideas and Machines."⁴⁴

The beginning years of the 1930s witnessed the emergence of new American perspectives on China that shifted the tone of many of the articles that reported on

⁴² "Loss of 'Face' Seen as Benefit," *New York Times*, May 17, 1931, p. 60.

⁴³ James W. Bennett, "The Five-Thousand-Year Plan in China," *New York Times*, April 26, 1931, p. SM6.

⁴⁴ "China Travels the Road to Modernity: From Their Centuries-Old Thoughts and Traditions, Her People are Turning to Western Ideas and Machines," *New York Times*, July 12, 1931, p. SM4.

Chinese society and politics, yet they did not extend this positive outlook to Chinese culture. Other articles that aided in the expansion of the rhetoric surrounding China, however, attempted to “clear up the long standing mystery about the mysterious Chinese.”⁴⁵ By demonstrating that contrary to many of the popular notions of China which foregrounded alien or threatening aspects of Chinese society, their customs and complexes, as British author Florence Ayschough asserted, “aren’t mysterious – merely different from ours.”⁴⁶ While many of the individuals from this new generation of “China experts” did help to formulate an image of China that appeared far less hostile than the older representation with which it was competing, the information and images that these individuals presented to the American public often turned out to be as problematic as the images they sought to replace. A 1931 interview with the author cited above, for example, points to the distortion that remained within the Western imagination of Chinese society. When asked to describe the nature of the Chinese, Ayschough, whom the reporter deemed to be “the foremost woman authority on Chinese culture,” stated that “the reason that a Chinaman wears a poker face is because he is full of nerves, even as you and I, and is trying not to show it;” however, unlike Westerners, “when the Chinese have suppressed themselves until they can’t stand it another moment... they go ‘Chee.’ ‘Chee’ is the word for ‘blowing off steam’ and also ‘an explosion of the mind.’”⁴⁷

Articles describing unique aspects of Chinese society helped facilitate the proliferation of this new image, particularly when they provided a means of

⁴⁵ Alta May Coleman, “Stolid Chinese Really Nervous, Author Insists, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 7, 1931, p.11.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid. Chee is more commonly rendered in pinyin as *qi*.

interacting with “Chinese” culture; they reinforced notions of what Chinese culture was and how it functioned. These interactions often centered around daily activities and allowed for readily made comparisons between Chinese and American societies. Food was one of the common ways through which this process of interaction took place. Many newspapers printed articles featuring recipes that would allow Americans to experience a “truly Chinese dinner” first hand, and provided the cultural background in which the dishes originated; the 1932 article “Dessert Served First at Real Chinese Dinner: And Bird’s Nest Soup is Second Course” provides the following description:

China, for thousands of years mysterious, inscrutable, aloof, today had taken up a new job – that of counselor and inspiring genius in many of America’s swankiest cuisines. Just one thing the Oriental artists ask of their enthusiastic American disciples – that they go the whole way with them and don’t, for lack of immediate materials, let a Chinese inspiration become ‘Americanized,’ in the making.⁴⁸

The “authentic” China menu and recipes that accompanies this article include: bird’s nest soup, boned duck or chicken fried with mushrooms, Chinese potatoes, chop suey, rice, egg foo yong, preserved ginger, nut, rice cakes, and Chinese tea.

Through the presentation of information pertaining to Chinese customs and culture, newspapers allowed for the rapid dissemination of this new American image of China to a large segment of the American public. They were aided in this effort by novelists whose work enabled this updated American image of China to spread nationally. Pearl S. Buck, and her book *The Good Earth*, which was published in the spring of 1931, is one of the most important contributions in this regard.

⁴⁸ “Mary Meade, “Dessert Served First at Real Chinese Dinner: And Bird’s Nest Soup is Second Course,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 24, 1932, p. 14.

Despite the ambivalence some in the literary community might have had approaching a novel in which the narrative revolves around a family of Chinese farmers, Buck's narrative "portrays a China unfamiliar to the average reader, a China in which, happily, there is not hint of mystery or exoticism. There is very little in her book of the quality which we are accustomed to label 'Oriental.'"⁴⁹ It is this aspect of Buck's work that has led scholars like Dower to highlight the importance of her work in helping to "create a countervailing tide of respect for the long-suffering common people of China."⁵⁰

While relying much more heavily on many of the "Oriental" tropes that Buck had largely avoided, Earl Derr Bigger's work, which featured the detective Charlie Chan, also aided in the dissemination of newer images of China and countered the longstanding association of the Chinese with trickery and evil. While hoping to add "local color" to a story set in Hawaii, for example, Bigger decided to create a Chinese detective since "sinister and wicked Chinese were old stuff of mystery stories, but an amiable Chinese acting on the side of the law and order had never been used up to that time."⁵¹

The inroads made by Western commentators in shifting the image of China from one that was associated with an outdated national infrastructure and cultural characteristics to a country that was making great strides in recasting itself as a modern nation helped weaken the dominance of the pre-Exclusion Era image with

⁴⁹ "'The Good Earth' and Other Recent Works of Fiction," *New York Times*, March 15, 1931, p. 60.

⁵⁰ Dower, p. 39.

⁵¹ "Creating Charlie Chan," *New York Times*, March 22, 1931, p. X6.

which it had long been associated. As the decade progressed, the ever-worsening condition of Japanese-American relations made Americans take stock of the United States' position with regard to the countries in East Asia. Building on this more accessible image of China that Western commentators had established, the Chinese were able to help direct the way in which the image of their own country and culture were projected to a large segment of the American public for the first time. One of the key figures in making this transition was Lin Yutang.

While Lin was not unknown to those familiar with Chinese political and cultural affairs throughout the 1930s, the publication of his book *My Country and My People* in the United States in 1935 provided a springboard from which Lin was able to build a certain degree of notoriety. American reporters had interviewed him before, but the publication of *My Country and My People* provided Lin with one of the first occasions in which he was able to articulate his views at length without being subjected to the editorial discretion of the authors and journalists who would ultimately craft the article or narrative that the American public received. Although this book reached the *New York Times* bestsellers list and Lin published six additional books in English prior to the start of the Second World War, it is impossible to accurately determine the percentage of the American public that may have been influenced through Lin's books.⁵² But the reach of Lin's work extended beyond the literary circles. Beginning in 1936, Lin began contributing to the *New York Times*, which likely expanded the number of Americans who were familiar with his work.

⁵² "Best Sellers of the Week, Here and Elsewhere," October 7, 1935, p. 13.

In seizing the opportunity to contribute his points of view with regards to China and Chinese society, Lin was able to address prevalent inaccuracies through articles like “How to Pronounce Chinese Names.”⁵³ It also allowed Lin to challenge those perceptions of China that Westerners had cast early on. While Chinese scholars such as Hu Shi and K.T. Mei had challenged foreign representations of China before, their works had only appeared in small publications.⁵⁴ Lin, however, was able to use one of the largest circulating daily newspapers in the United States as a vehicle to counter pre-Exclusion Era conceptions of China more effectively. In his 1936 article “A Chinese Gives US Light on His Nation: In His Country, He Says, a People We Do Not Understand Struggles For Progress, with the Future Entirely Dependent on Events,” for example, Lin attempts to undercut the authority missionaries have previously claimed; he writes:

The world is full of muddles and China is one of them. China is professedly misunderstood or not understood at all in the West, and it really seems to me that she does not care. Through well-meaning but misguided propaganda on the part of many missionaries and travelers, and through the total neglect of propaganda on China's part, the average Westerner has about as clear a picture of what is going on in China as he has of the monkey's image in the moon...the causes of this misunderstanding are easy to point out. The most immediate is the missionary propaganda in this country. It stands to reason that for missionaries – for some of whom I have the highest respect – to admit to the Kansas farmers that the Chinese are essentially a decent people, leading an essentially decent life and therefore not necessarily destined for hell, would be nothing short of insanity. Unless the Chinese are going to hell, why send missionaries? Thus the missionaries find themselves committed to a nonsensical proposition from the very beginning. And they have to put it on a level that

⁵³ Lin Yutang, “How to Pronounce Chinese Names,” *New York Times*, December 20, 1936, p. E4.

⁵⁴ Hu Shih, “What I Believe,” *Forum and Century*, LXXXV (January 1931), p. 38; K.T. Mei, “Humanism and Modern China,” *The Bookman; a Review of Books and Life* 73 (4), p. 365.

Kansas or Kentucky children and women can understand, with a natural emphasis on foot-binding and opium and rat-eating, which are thrilling enough to make a good Sunday evening talk and at the same time lachrymal enough to draw forth the widow's mite.⁵⁵

While the Westerners who helped shift the manner in which China was portrayed to the American public were largely separated into those who depicted China as a great country in the making and those who sought to demystify Chinese culture, many of the articles Lin published in the last half of the 1930s integrated these two approaches; he formed positive linkages between China's history and culture and its political struggle against Japan. In articles such as "As 'Philosophic China' Faces 'Military Japan': As a Chinese Sees the Characteristics of Two Nations," "Key Man in China's Future: The 'Coolie' A Portrait of the Stoical and Humorous Toiler Who is also a Stubborn Fighter," "Captive Peiping Holds the Soul of Ageless China: Culture, Charm, Mystery, and Romance Linger in the Vivid City Occupied by the Japanese" Lin contends that China already was a great country.⁵⁶

Like many of their contemporaries in the literary and academic fields, members of the Nationalist government and personalities closely associated with the Nationalists were able to help redirect the way in which the image of China

⁵⁵ Lin Yutang, "A Chinese Gives US Light on His Nation: In His Country, He Says, a People We Do Not Understand Struggles For Progress, with the Future Entirely Dependent on Events," *New York Times*, November 22, 1936, p. SM10.

⁵⁶ Lin Yutang, "As 'Philosophic China' Faces 'Military Japan': As a Chinese Sees the Characteristics of Two Nations," *New York Times*, December 27, 1936, p. SM4; Lin Yutang, "Key Man in China's Future: The 'Coolie' A Portrait of the Stoical and Humorous Toiler Who is also a Stubborn Fighter," *New York Times*, November 14, 1937, p. 152; Lin Yutang, "Captive Peiping Holds the South of Ageless China: Culture, Charm, Mystery, and Romance Linger in the Vivid City Occupied by the Japanese," *New York Times*, August 15, 1937, p. 110.

developed through the contribution of articles to American newspapers. Some of these articles such as Song Meiling's article "Mme. Chiang Reveals How Rebels Capitulated," which attempted to explain how her husband, Chiang Kai-shek, was able to escape after being taken prisoner by Zhang Xueliang in Xi'an, merely sought to present the Nationalists' spin on what might otherwise be viewed as a potentially embarrassing political blunder.⁵⁷ Others, however, were able to make clear linkages between Chinese society's achievements and the political actions being carried out by the Chinese in an effort to ensure their survival. One such article, written by Song Qingling, wife of the late Sun Yat-sen and the sister of Song Meiling, examines the way in which the three major principles laid out by Sun as a guide for the development of China (nationalism, democracy, and peoples' livelihood) were faring in China during Japan's occupation. She argues:

China's war of resistance against Japanese invasion is the translation into terms of practical action of Dr. Sun's first principle of nationalism. We Chinese know very well the victory over the Japanese aggressors is the first condition of its realization. There is little danger of any neglect of this principle of national independence so long as China is fighting for her very existence as a nation.⁵⁸

The Nationalist government was not only able to capitalize on the sympathy China's position created in the U.S., but many of the articles written by those affiliated with the Nationalists also helped to solidify the alliance that had already been formed between China and the United States. The passage of federal laws such as the Lend Lease Act in March 1941, which was enacted for the expressed purpose of providing aid to "the government of any country whose defense the President

⁵⁷ Mayling Chiang, "Mme. Chiang Reveals How Rebels Capitulated," *New York Times*, April 19, 1937, p. 23.

⁵⁸ "Mme. Sun Analyzes China's Struggle," *New York Times*, October 9, 1941, p. 6

deems vital to the defense of the United States,” demonstrated the American government’s assessment of China’s importance since it provided military aid to the China.⁵⁹ Articles written by members of the Nationalist government furthered this reputation, appealing to the American public by focusing on shared social and political concerns. While the article written by Song Qingling cited above touched upon issues of U.S. interest in East Asia, others sought to make China a vital component to the successful resolution of the situation in Europe that was of American concern as well. The publication of “Chinese See Nazis Spurring on Japan,” by the former ambassador to Germany Chen Chien, for example, contends that

until they [the citizens of Germany] face starvation or major military defeats on the battlefield, I do not believe they will revolt or that any revolt will succeed under the stringent surveillance of the government and the Nazi party. But revolt within Germany and Italy is by no means the only hope for the democracies. The Far Eastern situation is a key to the second World War.⁶⁰

The interviews, articles, or novels, that Western commentators gave in the first few years of the 1930s nudged the rhetoric surrounding the way in which Chinese society was portrayed to the American people in new directions. While those showing that China was on the road to modernity portrayed positive

⁵⁹ While mostly commonly known as the Lend Lease Act, the official title of this act is “An Act to Further Promote the Defense of the United States.” Public Laws. Part 1 of United States Statutes at Large Containing the Laws and Concurrent Resolutions Enacted During the First Session of the Seventy-Seventh Congress of the United States of America, 1941-1942, and Treaties, International Agreements Other than Treaties, and Proclamations. Vol. 55 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1942): 31-33.

⁶⁰ “Chen Chieh, “Chinese Sees Nazis Spurring on Japan,” *New York Times*, August 10, 1941, p. 19.

implications for China, attempts to demystified Chinese society often led American perceptions of China to become further distorted. With the intensification of U.S. economic and political concerns, however, members of Chinese society were able to fill the gap America's shifting goals left open by articulating their own views of Sino-American relations and by highlighting commonalities between China and the United States. In speaking for themselves, the Nationalist government and members of China's literary and academic elite helped redirect the way in which the American public perceived China: from a weak, backwards country that was plagued by internal problems to a country that was critical to the success of America's political goals. The Nationalists and Chinese elites were not alone in this effort to recast China's image in the American media. The Chinese living in the United States also played a crucial role in shifting the American public's perception of the Chinese and Chinese society through increased interaction with members of the American public. The way in which the Chinese living in the United States facilitated this process will be explored in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: The Overseas Chinese and the American Public

While the Nationalist government and members of the Chinese elite were helping to alter the image of Chinese society and China's role on the international stage by engaging directly with the print media, the members of the overseas Chinese communities that existed in many of the major American cities aided their fellow countrymen and women in this regard by interacting with the American public in ways that had been largely unavailable in previous decades. While they did not engage with the media directly, the shifting nature of the Chinese community's interaction with the American public at large was chronicled in the newspapers, often appearing as addendums to articles that reported on Japan's occupation of China and the effect it was having on the Chinese. As the articles written by the Chinese elite articulated Chinese concerns and helped reimagination Chinese culture, the interaction of the overseas Chinese community with members of the American public grounded these articles and aspects of Chinese society by demonstrating Western engagement with Chinese culture.

Similar to the reports and articles regarding Chinese culture discussed in chapter 3, most of the American public's interaction with "Chinese" culture during the first few years of the 1930s was a result of American intervention in, and interpretation of, Chinese society. Frequently the source of inspiration for the themes of exotic parties and charity events, "Chinese" culture was often incorporated into the broader category of "the other" and deployed at random to

suit the needs of those charged with orchestrating these productions. A review of the Samarkand Ball, a charity event held in Miami in 1931, and its “perfect Oriental setting” demonstrates how Chinese culture was incorporated as a means of exoticization:

A perfect oriental setting greeted the eyes of the members and their several hundred guests when they attended the Samarkand ball. From the swimming pool, on which floated a miniature Chinese junk, rose a Chinese temple. A flight of steps led to the great statue of the Chinese goddess Steva, at the base and back of which were myriad of lights. Great figures on the steps of the temple guarded the eight armed deity. Trees were hung with Chinese lanterns and lantern bearers carried their lights at the ends of bamboo poles. Both patios were flooded with violet lights, while green lights played from the temple and the mosques, which rose in the distance. The illumination was heightened in weird effect by the dim red glow from the incense burners. The entire dance patio was hung in Persian draperies of oriental colors, and in front of every pillar was a huge Persian vase. Old Persian rugs marked the runway of the loggia and were on the walls. Members of the orchestra were attired in Persian costumes with white turbans and red sashes, similar to those worn in smart oriental hotels. The dinner was prepared by a chef from India.⁶¹

There is a differentiation between elements that originate from various cultures within this Oriental themed event, yet the fact these cultures are conflated suggests a degree of separation and partitioning off of cultures that are familiar from those that still maintained an air of mystique. In the majority of articles printed in the American media that described the overseas Chinese community and the events that took place in the Chinatowns across the United States, this sense of separation from the rest of American society remains.

⁶¹ “Oriental Ball at Miami to Help Charity,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 22, 1931, p. H2.

Articles in which the print media depicts the overseas Chinese community as a self-governing, insular unit with minimal interaction with members of the outside community is one way in which this separation was portrayed. The 1931 article “Report of Tong Killing as Chinese Leaders Meet to Talk Peace,” for example, reports that “the great men of Chinatown met behind locked doors to end the power of the tongs forever. They gathered in the Chinese consulate at the call of Consul General Chang and the venerated Li Ching-yat, president of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, which is the government of Chinatown.”⁶² This separation of Chinese society from the rest of American society was not limited to the “government’s” authority over business dealings that took place between Chinese merchants, but permeated most levels of society, including everything from public holidays to public schooling.⁶³

The perceived separation between the overseas Chinese community and American society that the closed nature of these interactions engendered was further reified through the geographical boundaries that served as lines of demarcation between these two distinct cultures and customs. These distinctions were perhaps most visible during the festivities that were organized in celebration of important fetes, such as the Chinese New Year, which in 1931 was described in the following manner:

It [the parade] danced by curio shops, windows cluttered with knock-knacks of the East destined for the souvenir hunters of the West. It went by small, subterranean restaurants with shuttered windows and an air of mystery. Then, at the corner, it turned and disappeared into

⁶² “Report Tong Killing as Chinese Leaders Meet to Talk Peace,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 19, 1931, p. 3.

⁶³ “Chinatown Merry in New Year Fete,” *New York Times*, February 8, 1932, p. 36.

headquarters. There, on the fourth floor, guarded well by an iron gate and the wooden portrait of a laughing cat, it brought the Chinese New Year to New York. That part of Chinatown which still believes spent all of yesterday in preparation. South of Bayard Street, the dividing line between the Orient and the Occident, there were flowers, decorations, and signs in every shop. Florists' wagons drove through the busy streets, and electricians and workers prepared the On Leong's home for a celebration dance. There were the delicacies from the Orient and the suckling pig that is much admired for the feast.⁶⁴

Despite the partition that the American media had drawn between the overseas Chinese community and the rest of American society, interaction did occur. While it is likely situations that involved amicable exchanges between members of both societies were not rare occurrences, the instances of Sino-American engagement that were picked up by the media often highlighted the suspicion that still tainted American views of China and Chinese society. The article reporting on the New Years celebration cited above, for example, notes the involvement of five members of the police force as an honor guard by the department; however, the article further speculates that perhaps another reason for police involvement was to deter the "hatchet-men," or Chinese hit men, from striking during the event as well.⁶⁵

Depictions of corruption and crime in Chinatowns across the United States were part and parcel of the pre-Exclusion Era representation of American Chinatowns, and the articles published at the beginning of the 1930s heavily continued to fixate on these criminal elements within the Chinese community. While headlines reporting on Chinese who were smuggled into the country and

⁶⁴ "Chinese Here Greet the New Year 4884," *New York Times*, February 17, 1931, p. 33.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

minor cases of theft were not uncommon, the most sensational stories frequently featured depictions of these hatchet-men, feuding tongs, and the sale of opium. The article "Tongs Under Guard Plan Aid for Idle" is indicative of the heightened degree of caution the tongs instilled in the local police forces. The meeting of On Leong Tong and the Hip Sing Tong in New York in April 1931, for instance, highlights the need for extra policemen and detectives to be on hand.⁶⁶

Despite the lack of any significant altercations at this "convention of two rival brotherhoods," this article points to additional reasons that may have contributed to the image of the Chinese as a distinct and separate component within the United States, leading some to believe that there was cause for concern beyond the possibility of illegal activity. Delegates from across the United States attended this meeting to discuss outstanding financial disputes and to discuss the problem of unemployment within the Chinese community. An interview with a spokesman for the On Leong Tong revealed that "a census of the members disclosed that about 25 per cent of the Chinese in this country were without employment...there had been a slackening in the restaurant, laundry and other business in which the Chinese are engaged."⁶⁷ While the purpose of the meeting was stated to be a resolution of these issues, the portrayal of such a large number of "idle" Chinese very likely added to any concern the mere presence of the tongs might have inspired. By 1931 the Great Depression had left large segments of the American public unemployed, and reports of high unemployment within the overseas Chinese community meant more competition.

⁶⁶ "Tongs Under Guard Plan Aid for Idle," *New York Times*, April 29, 1931, p. 19.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

As was the case with the rhetoric surrounding the image of China and the Chinese community, the shifting conditions in the 1930s created new opportunities for the overseas Chinese community to alter the manner in which they interacted with other segments of the American public in ways that were advantageous to their goals. Two of most prominent of these objectives were the accumulation of funds to aid the Chinese resistance against Japan and the repositioning of China as America's friend and ally.

By the later half of the 1930s, the segregation that characterized a large number of the media's depictions of the overseas Chinese community had been replaced; though the distinct nature of "Orientals" still remained a prominent feature in the articles published at the end of the decade, it also portrayed members of the overseas community with more recognizable "American" features. The following excerpt from an article published in the *New York Times* in October 1937, after the outbreak of full-scale warfare in China, for example, highlights some of the new features members of the overseas Chinese community, and Chinatown itself, had adopted:

Outwardly, its the same old Chinatown, but the 'feel' of the place is different...That the printed word in Chinatown is more than ever in high favor is shown by placards, mostly worded in English, but some in half Cantonese characters...Down on Grant Avenue is Fong & Fong's new modern soft drink palace and restaurant, a spot highly favored by 'new China' – young, well educated, a bit on the sophisticated side. Sylph-like oriental maidens, modern to their coral-tipped fingers, slip into the leather chairs, greet the grinning attendant with a 'Hello, Joe,' and in university English, discuss drives, quotas, and subscriptions. Back of the counter, between coffee urns and glass shelving, such signs as 'Lichee Ice Cream,' 'Chop Suey Sundae' and 'Cantaloupe a la mode'

have made way for 'Skating Party – War Relief China,' 'Benefit Fund, China Medical Relief' and 'China Refugee Fund.'⁶⁸

One way in which the Chinese living in the United States were able to cultivate this Americanized, less threatening image of themselves was the ability of the Chinese to engage with this image in ways that had not been possible for previous generations of Chinese migrants. During the late 1930s, the Chinese in the United States harnessed the image of "Old China," using it not only to inspire interest in the community, culture, and their native country, but by simultaneously building upon the image of the harmonious relationship between the United States and China that the Nationalist government and the Chinese elite helped to create through the publication of articles in American newspapers. As articles promoting tours of Chinatown in an effort to raise money for Chinese war victims became commonplace, the Chinese living in the United States capitalized on them by marketing "traditional" Chinese customs as novelty items, a strategy Adam McKeown has noted in his study of Chinese migrant networks in Chicago.⁶⁹

Descriptions of parades celebrating the Spring Festival, while still conveying a level of mystique similar to that of the depiction of Chinese New Year in 1931 through the depiction of the "ceremonial dance of the 'Boxers,'" who "faced each other with raised spears and performed a warrior ceremony that linked the

⁶⁸ Tom White, "War Echoes Out West: San Francisco Chinatown Presents New Aspect to the Visitor," *New York Times*, October 31, 1937, p. 193.

⁶⁹ "4,000 Sightseers Swamp Guides in Chinatown Tour," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 16, 1935, p. 4; "Plan Chinatown Tour to Help War Sufferers," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 28, 1938, p. 14; Adam McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change: Peru, Chicago, Hawaii, 1900-1936* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). See chapter "Exotica and Respectability in Chicago's Chinatown."

symbolism of centuries ago with the modern spirit of China,” also shifted by promoting the image of a “large American flag [being] borne with a Chinese flag at the head of the parade. Behind the flags a detachment of Chinese Boy and Girl Scouts marched with eyes straight ahead.”⁷⁰

Such outlooks not only depicted the Chinese as incorporating more elements of American culture into their traditional events, but also showed Americans interacting with Chinese culture, making the image of a blending of these two societies much more potent. One such example was depicted in an article regarding the introduction of chopsticks to an audience of American school children: “East met West yesterday in a restaurant in Chinatown when a group of American children lunched with a smaller number of Chinese children. The upshot was that some of the Americans tried to handle chopsticks, while the Chinese listened to explanations of favorite American foods.”⁷¹

Similar to the rhetoric surrounding the image of China and Chinese society, the interaction between the overseas Chinese community and the American public at the beginning of the 1930s conformed to the norms created during the pre-Exclusion Era. As the decade progressed the changing nature of world political and economic conditions created an opportunity that opened the possibility for greater engagement between the Chinese and other segments of American society. These

⁷⁰ “War Ambulance Replaces Dragon in Chinatown New Year Parade: Thousands See Celebration that Emphasizes Grim Spirit of Modern China -- \$30,000 Raised for Cars to Carry Wounded,” *New York Times*, February 20, 1939, p. 14.

⁷¹ “Young Americans Try Chopsticks at Lunch with Chinese Children: Fifty Youngsters Eat Oriental Food in Mott Street in Move to Help Youth Here Understand China’s Culture,” *New York Times*, April 23, 1939, p. 53.

shifts in both America's concerns with regard to East Asia and the Chinese community's redirection of its own image were reflected in American newspapers.

Conclusion

In an article entitled “Relations Between China and the West: Necessity of Better Understanding,” which appeared in the bilingual Chinese-English newspaper *The Progress*(進步英華週刊) in 1930, the contributing author Chao-Cu Wu, who was the Chinese Minister to the United States, bemoaned China’s position within world affairs and with regard to the treaties and contracts that had largely been forced upon the former dynastic rulers, yet Wu was at a loss as to the manner in which China could improve her position. He writes that with the nationalism of the Chinese people “now awakened, they refuse to be any longer shackled in the march to their destiny by a series of undertakings [unequal agreements with foreign powers] which, in private life, neither law nor ethics would have permitted to stand. There is unfortunately, no court of sufficient authority able to set them aside. What then is to be done?”⁷²

While no legal court had sufficient authority to set aside the subservient role China had been forced to bear and the image of a backwards society that went with it, the shifting nature of American political and economic concerns throughout the 1930s allowed for the sway held by the court of public opinion in the United States to override this image, if not the laws themselves.

⁷² Chao-Shu Wu (伍朝樞), “Relations Between China and the West: Necessity of Better Understanding,” *The Progress* (進步英華週刊), November 22, 1930, p. 1.

While American fears and ambitions opened the door for the reconfiguration of Chinese society to take place, they alone did not guide its development in the daily newspapers. Magazines that were produced by the likes of Henry Luce continued to run articles that cast China in the role of an America in the making, a nation that adhered to the principles of democracy, the market economy, and perhaps most importantly, Christianity, as is demonstrated by the 1941 article devoted to Chinese scrolls which portrayed the life of Christ and served as “a touching affirmation that China, even in the midst of battle, holds to the spiritual and culture values which America and China alike are now fighting to preserve.”⁷³ Articles printed in publications that were not affiliated with members of the missionary circle, however, continued to retain distinct Chinese attributes. This is because it was through these publications that the Nationalist government, the Chinese elite, and members of the overseas Chinese community were able to engage with the American public at large.

While these images never merged in their entirety, by the time the United States entered the war, the image of China as a friend and ally, which had long been portrayed in publications that were notorious for their promotion of the “ideal” Chinese society, no longer seemed out of place in the pages of other publications. When the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor, China’s position as America’s ally had been firmly established; Anne O’Hare McCormick was correct in

⁷³ “The Story of Christ in Chinese Art: Scholars at Peiking University Make a Christmas Portfolio for Life,” *Life*, Vol. 11, no. 25, p. 40-49.

declaring the question period to be over, at least until a new shift occurred with the onset of the Cold War.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ "How to Tell Japs from the Chinese: Angry Citizens Victimize Allies with Emotional Outburst at Enemy," *Life*, December 22, 1941, p. 81-82.

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