

AMERICA PERCEIVED

THE MAKING OF CHINESE IMAGES
OF THE UNITED STATES, 1945-1953

HONG ZHANG

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To my parents, Zhang Peiduo and Cheng Xiaoqin

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Beida	Beijing University
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CPV	Chinese People's Volunteers
GMD	Guomindang
FRUS	Foreign Relations of the United States
Jiaoda	Jiaotong University
Lianda	National Southwest Associated University or <i>Guoli Xinan Lianhe Daxue</i>
Meidi	American Imperialism
MFN	Most Favored Nation
NA	National Archives
SCAP	Supreme Commander for Allied Powers
UNIS	United States Information Service
Yanda	Yanjing University

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INTRODUCTION

The years between the end of World War II and the outbreak of the Korean War witnessed the peak, decline, and end of American involvement and influence in China. These crucial “years of uncertainty” represented a significant turning point in the history of Sino-American relations.¹ While recent scholarly attention to this period has led to a more profound understanding of a turbulent and intricate phase in Chinese-American relations, most of the interpretations deal with the formal triangular relationship between the United States, the Chinese Nationalist Party (Guomindang, or GMD), and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), often in the larger context of global politics.² This study moves beyond the policy- and diplomacy-oriented approach. Instead of rehashing the diplomatic history of the late 1940s and early 1950s, it places the shifting perceptions of the United States among a significant political group—the young, volatile, and politically sensitive urban Chinese—into a historical perspective through examining especially the origin, development, and eruption of their anti-American sentiment (*fanMei qingxu*) in the post-World War II period.³ The ups and downs in their views not only affected the political fortunes of the two rival parties in China, the GMD and the CCP, but also contributed to the drastic turn in U.S.-China relations. A closer examination of the changing attitudes among politically active, young, educated Chinese toward the unfolding American involvement in East Asia in the postwar period will further demystify the Communist takeover of China in 1949. It will also contribute to a better understanding of a volatile age in Sino-American relations.

Furthermore, a study of the anti-American sentiment during the period in question will shed new light on the mind-set of educated Chinese, as their political thinking was entwined with class, cultural, and moral concerns. For example, ostensibly, their vehement response to the alleged rape of a college student by a U.S. marine in late 1946 reflected their nationalistic outrage. At a deeper level, however, it disclosed a cultural and class bias inherent in their

thinking. In this sense, the anti-American outbursts also revealed how urban educated youths viewed themselves.

Studies regarding American images of China have amply demonstrated that the only certainty that has characterized the American views of China is the uncertainty, punctuated by a fluctuating "love/hate" syndrome.⁴ Meanwhile, many young Chinese intellectuals also found themselves entertaining ambivalent feelings toward the United States during the first few decades of the twentieth century.⁵ America was often viewed as both a relevant model and a threat to China.⁶ In his *Beautiful Imperialist: China Perceives America*, David Shambaugh studies the Chinese images of America during a later period and concludes that ambivalence as manifested in the dichotomy of admiration and denigration typifies the Chinese perceptions of the United States.⁷

The conflicting sentiments of admiration and resentment toward the United States often served as a prism that reflected the understanding and thinking of the educated Chinese about their own country. For the most part, the views of young Chinese intellectuals toward the United States in the first half of the twentieth century developed in the general framework of their quest for "national salvation," an issue that dominated their political thinking. Their images of America were closely related to their concerns about China's destiny and often oscillated depending upon whether they perceived American involvement as assisting or impeding the achievement of Chinese independence from foreign control. Consequently, the United States alternated, in the eyes of many, between providing guidance or inspiration on the one hand and being an obstacle or even threat on the other.

Not only students educated in China but also American-trained Chinese students contributed to the making of Chinese images of the United States. From the late nineteenth century on, an increasing number of Chinese students went to America to study. The U.S. government promoted the education of Chinese students at American institutions of higher education, for it expected American-educated students to be "saturated with American sentiment"⁸ and to act as transmitters of American values upon their return to China. However, direct exposure to things American often resulted in mixed emotions among these students, which was manifested in admiration for American material wealth, political power, scientific and technological development, efficiency, exuberant energy, and optimistic outlook; fascination with America's political system, family system, and customs; and resentment of American discriminatory immigration policy and racial prejudice against the Chinese and the perceived gap between American rhetoric and practice. The returned students and scholars wrote extensively about their impressions of American society, and their writings helped to shape Chinese perceptions of the United States.⁹ The 1905 Chinese boycott of American goods reflected the influence and power of such writings.

If ambivalence and mixed emotions characterized the attitudes of many young Chinese intellectuals toward the United States during the early decades of the twentieth century, political militancy among radical students in Chinese colleges and to some extent high schools set the tone for the turn from the sentiment of "love" during World War II to that of "hate" in the postwar period

and for the shaping of the larger public images of the United States. The fluctuations in the perceptions, therefore, testify to "the malleability of political language and imagery in general."¹⁰

The American public was largely oblivious to the growth of strong anti-American sentiment in China. In 1948, to correct the general American misperception that the United States enjoyed a high prestige in postwar China, the American Foundation of Foreign Affairs published a rare study of Chinese opinion on U.S. activities in the country. In the preface, William Neumann, research director for the project, cautioned against American "apathy or blindness to criticism from abroad." He maintained that, since the American government had provided considerable aid to the Chinese Nationalist government, the uninformed American "is likely to believe that American prestige is therefore high, and that his country has contributed to the welfare of China," when in fact "the contrary is closer to the truth."¹¹

Hoping to see a strong, pro-American Chinese government, Washington had long urged the Nationalist government led by Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jie-shi) to implement reforms and broaden its base to attract Chinese intellectuals, whose support was solicited by the U.S. government itself.¹² Nevertheless, American policy toward East Asia in the postwar period served to alienate this numerically small yet politically articulate group of Chinese.¹³ Even before the Communist takeover, the U.S. government had lost the battle for the hearts and minds of many young educated Chinese, and had, in a sense, "lost China." In an article titled "America Loses Chinese Good Will" published in early 1949, the historian Dorothy Borg asserted that "in terms of securing Chinese good will American policy has been a conspicuous failure."¹⁴

Intellectual activism has played a significant role in shaping the course of modern Chinese history. Historically, educated Chinese, or Confucian literati, saw themselves as the cream of the state, obligated to criticize openly any deviations from Confucian moral principles. Following historical precedents and inspired by a strong sense of patriotic duty, many modern Chinese intellectuals believed keenly that they were responsible for the fate of the nation and should speak out on behalf of the Chinese people. Despairing over a weak and unstable China that had lost its old luster, Chinese college students carried with them a sense of mission and played their part in fomenting change.¹⁵ Student protesters of the first half of the twentieth century, however, moved sharply away from the traditional mode of literati remonstrations. Instead, they turned the streets into political stages to publicize their opinions dramatically and to elicit wider support for their views.¹⁶

The special position that educated youths occupied in their society made it imperative for any ruling party or aspiring political organization to take their views or outcries seriously. Historians have highlighted the prominent roles of college students in a country undergoing revolutionary change. In his influential book, *Student Nationalism in China*, John Israel establishes the importance of student nationalist outbursts in Chinese politics during the Nanjing decade (1927-37). He claims that the record of the student movement demonstrates that it "exerted a disproportionately strong influence on the course of China's

history.”¹⁷ Jeffrey Wasserstrom’s *Student Protests in Twentieth-Century China* focuses especially on the role and techniques of student protests in the Republican era (1912–49), during which educated youths continually articulated their challenge to the political authorities. Wasserstrom argues that student protests in Republican China were often subversive in nature and that even though they “did not constitute *physical* threats to the status quo, student protesters posed very real *symbolic* threats.” Their words and deeds “raised doubts in the mind of the audience about the right of those in power to rule.”¹⁸ Student political activism in urban China played an important role in the ultimate Communist victory. In *Making Urban Revolution in China*, Joseph Yick establishes the salience of nonmilitary factors, such as the failure of the GMD to secure its urban bases and the allegiance of the urban populace, especially the educated youths, for the Nationalist government’s collapse in 1949, in contrast to the CCP’s successful mobilization of students in its political confrontation with the GMD.¹⁹

However, even though college students featured prominently in the political and cultural movements of Republican China, they were not a singular entity and one can hardly encompass them under one blanket term of “national student culture.” Not only did students themselves come from diverse social and cultural backgrounds, but also the various institutions of higher education during the Republican period emerged from distinct social and cultural backgrounds and developed their own individual values, styles, and political leanings.²⁰ Against the backdrop of cultural and social diversities, college campuses nevertheless proved to be highly politically charged centers and witnessed intense polarization in the late 1940s.

Driven largely by a sense of national dignity and pride, by a fervent desire for full equality in foreign relations, by frustration with the devastating Civil War, and by an ingrained sense of their special social role, many politically committed young Chinese, who were among the most ardent of Chinese nationalists, became highly critical of postwar U.S. policy toward China and Japan. The vigorously expressed anti-American sentiment in GMD-controlled urban China is a subject largely overlooked in the standard historical treatment of Sino-American relations.²¹ The issue, however, had significant implications for the outcome of the CCP-GMD power struggle and for the subsequent collision and estrangement between Communist China and the United States. In the short run, the American assistance gave the GMD an upper hand in its competition with the CCP for territorial control in the wake of the Japanese surrender. In the long run, however, American aid and presence were not significant enough to turn the war tide in the favor of the GMD. Nevertheless, they were visible and disconcerting enough to place the U.S. government as the primary target of Chinese nationalism. Furthermore, the surging anti-American sentiment among radical youths placed the Nationalist government in an untenable position, for it fell under heavy attack from young nationalists for having failed to bolster the prestige and dignity of China. Politically active young Chinese were especially critical of what they saw as the GMD’s supine policy toward the United States.

While the student anti-American outbursts were detrimental to the cause of the GMD, whose leaders appeared incapable of gratifying the nationalist demand, the CCP not only stimulated and capitalized upon them, but also greatly benefited from them. By claiming to stand at the forefront of the "student patriotic movement," the Communists made effective propaganda and allied themselves with politically influential members of Chinese society. In this sense, the movement figured significantly in easing the way of the Communists into urban China in 1949 despite their power concentration in the rural areas during and immediately after World War II. Ironically, the American endeavors to establish a pro-U.S. "democratic" China inadvertently undermined the cause of the GMD and contributed to the Communist urban victory. Furthermore, the CCP's successful alliance with politically active students during the late 1940s helped set the stage for the making of Chinese images of America during the Korean War.

In brief, during the late 1940s, Chinese youths launched a mounting wave of protest demonstrations and rallies against the U.S. government. Amid the surging anti-American sentiment, antipathy largely replaced admiration and the view of America as an obstacle to the achievement of China's political aspirations prevailed. In no other period in modern Chinese history did nonofficially sponsored anti-American sentiment manifest itself in such a virulent form. It revealed a most tangible strain in Chinese-American relations at the popular level. The negative sentiment was shaped by a combination of real and imagined insults and by the larger political, economic, and cultural contexts. The growing anti-American sentiment in the post-World War II period would be pushed to the forefront by the newly established Communist government and the image of an imperialistic United States working tenaciously against the interest of Chinese people persisted beyond the Civil War years.

NOTES

1. Dorothy Borg and Waldo Heinrichs, eds., *Uncertain Years: Chinese-American Relations, 1947-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), vii.

2. Outstanding among the recent works include Dorothy Borg and Waldo Heinrichs, *Uncertain Years*; Harry Harding and Yuan Ming, eds., *Sino-American Relations, 1945-1955: A Joint Reassessment of a Critical Decade* (Wilmington, Del.: A Scholarly Resources Imprint, 1989); William Whitney Stueck, Jr., *The Road to Confrontation: American Policy toward China and Korea, 1947-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981); Nancy B. Tucker, *Patterns in the Dust: Chinese-American Relations and the Recognition Controversy, 1949-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Steven I. Levine, *Anvil of Victory: The Communist Revolution in Manchuria, 1945-1948* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); Zi Zhongyun, *Meiguo duihua zhengce de yuanki he fazhan, 1945-1950* (The origins and development of U.S. policy toward China, 1945-1950) (Chongqing: Chongqing Chubanshe, 1987); Michael Schaller, *The U.S. Crusade in China, 1938-1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); Odd Arne Westad, *Cold War and Revolution: Soviet-American Rivalry and the Origins of the Chinese Civil War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation* (New York: Columbia Uni-

versity Press, 1994); and Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War, 1950–1953* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995).

3. Jon W. Huebner's concise article "Chinese Anti-Americanism, 1946–1948" was among the first works to deal exclusively with the subject of the anti-American phenomenon among Chinese intellectuals in the late 1940s. Based essentially on *Chinese Press Review* and secondary sources, Huebner's brief discussion of the non-Communist anti-American sentiment in the city of Shanghai offers a preliminary study of this important aspect of Sino-American relations. See Huebner, "Chinese Anti-Americanism, 1946–1948," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 17 (January 1987): 115–25.

4. Noteworthy among works of this nature include Harold R. Isaacs's classic *Scratches on Our Minds: American Images of China and India* (New York: John Day Company, 1958); T. Christopher Jespersen, *American Images of China, 1931–1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Warren I. Cohen, "American Perceptions of China," in *Dragon and Eagle: United States-China Relations, Past and Future*, ed. Michel Oksenberg and Robert B. Oxnam (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 54–86; Richard Madsen, *China and the American Dream: A Moral Inquiry* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995); and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, "Big Bad China and the Good Chinese: An American Fairy Tale," in *China Beyond the Headlines*, ed. Timothy B. Weston and Lionel M. Jensen (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 13–35.

5. In the context of modern China, the term "intellectual," or *zhishi fenzi*, literally translated as "elements with knowledge," in its broadest meaning refers to anyone who was educated. The historian Y.C. Wang defines twentieth-century Chinese intellectuals as "'educated men' in distinction to the masses who are uneducated." See Y.C. Wang, *Chinese Intellectuals and the West, 1872–1949* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), vii. According to the 1979 edition of the Chinese encyclopedia, *ci hai*, an "intellectual" means "anyone who labors with his brain and is in possession of certain cultural or scientific knowledge, workers in literature and arts, teachers, physicians, etc." See Yueh Tai-yun, *Intellectuals in Chinese Fiction* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1988), 5. Since Chinese students formed a crucial part of the intellectual community or the intelligentsia, in this book the term "intellectuals" refers not only to teachers, professors, journalists, scholars, and other professional people, but especially to college and in some cases high school students.

6. For arguments on this thesis, see also David Shambaugh's article "Anti-Americanism in China," in *Anti-Americanism: Origins and Context*, ed. Thomas P. Thornton, special issue of *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 497 (May 1988): 142–56; Michael Hunt's "Themes in Traditional and Modern Chinese Images of America," in *Mutual Images in U.S.-China Relations*, ed. David Shambaugh, Occasional Paper, no. 32, Wilson Center, 1988, 1–17. Two notable studies that offer especially early Chinese images of America are Michael H. Hunt's *The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and China to 1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983) and R. David Arkush and Leo O. Lee, trans. and eds., *Land without Ghosts: Chinese Impressions of America from the Mid-Nineteenth Century to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

7. David Shambaugh, *Beautiful Imperialist: China Perceives America, 1972–1990* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 3.

8. Jerome B. Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State in Modern China: A Narrative History* (New York: The Free Press, 1981), 215.

9. For an excellent collection of Chinese writings about American society and people, see Arkush and Lee, *Land without Ghosts*. In his article "The Unofficial Envoys:

Chinese Students in the United States, 1906–1938,” Hongshan Li argues that years of education in this country usually failed to inculcate favorable images in Chinese students. Rather, the students became resentful of America’s China policy. See Hongshan Li and Zhaohui Hong, eds., *Image, Perception, and the Making of U.S.-China Relations* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1998), 145–67.

10. John W. Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), xi.

11. Thurston Griggs, *Americans in China: Some Chinese Views* (Washington, D.C.: Foundation for Foreign Affairs, 1948), preface.

12. For a brief discussion of the futile American effort to “build up the Chinese liberals,” see Thomas D. Lutze, “America’s Japan Policy and the Defection of Chinese Liberals, 1947–1948,” in *George C. Marshall’s Mediation Mission to China, December 1945–January 1947*, ed. Larry I. Bland (Lexington, Va.: George C. Marshall Foundation, 1998), 461–97.

13. During the Republican period of 1912 to 1949, the Chinese student population in higher education constituted less than 0.01% of the whole population. In other words, only about 40,000 out of a population of 400,000,000 were able to receive a college education. See Philip West, *Yenching University and the Sino-American Relations, 1916–1952* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 90.

14. Dorothy Borg, “America Loses Chinese Good Will,” *Far Eastern Survey* 18 (February 23, 1949), 45.

15. For discussions on this issue, see Merle Goldman, *China’s Intellectuals: Advice and Dissent* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 3–10; and Merle Goldman, Timothy Cheek, and Carol Lee Hamrin, eds., *China’s Intellectuals and the State: In Search of a New Relationship* (Cambridge: The Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1987), 1–3. For a good general examination of the relationship between Chinese intellectuals and modern Chinese politics, see Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State in Modern China*.

16. See Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, *Student Protests in Twentieth-Century China: The View from Shanghai* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), for an excellent discussion of students’ dramatic and effective utilization of streets as political stages.

17. John Israel, *Student Nationalism in China, 1927–1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), 9. In *Rebels and Bureaucrats: China’s December 9ers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), Israel and Donald Klein establish the connection between emotional patriotism just prior to the Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) and the conversion of urban Chinese intellectuals to the rural-based Communist movement in Yan’an. In *The Politics of Depoliticization in Republican China: Guomindang Policy towards Student Political Activism, 1927–1949* (Berne, Germany: Peter Lang, 1996), pp. 23–31, Jianli Huang provides a brief discussion of student activism in twentieth-century China.

18. Wasserstrom, *Student Protests in Twentieth-Century China*, 18.

19. Joseph K.S. Yick, *Making Urban Revolution in China: The CCP-GMD Struggle for Beiping-Tianjin, 1945–1949* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1995).

20. Wen-Hsin Yeh’s book, *The Alienated Academy*, presents an interesting study of campus culture in individual Republican institutions and of the relationship between the social, political, and cultural orientation of an individual college and the student response to the larger national events during Republican China. The author identifies four major types of higher educational institutions in Republican China: state-sponsored universities, western missionary colleges, private Chinese colleges, and government-sponsored institutions; see *The Alienated Academy: Culture and Politics in Republican*