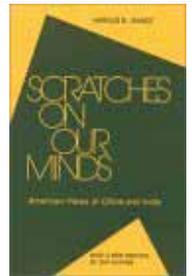


COMMUNIST CHINESE VS. NATIONALIST CHINESE VS. JAPANESE PROPAGANDA: THE 'JUST CAUSE'

THERE COMES A POINT WHEN PUBLIC OPINION REACHES CRITICAL MASS AND JUDGES A CAUSE TO BE 'JUST' OR 'UNJUST. This consensus can form around a war, an ideology, a race, a scandal or a personal injustice. There is a considerable pay-off for any propagandist who can help gain a 'just cause' position for the issue he or she is promoting (or vice versa) because it can take a long time to dislodge it. A cause, good or bad, leaves what the China journalist and academic Harold Isaacs called 'Scratches on our minds' ▶. Such 'scratches' may be based on nothing more than fear, prejudice or sheer ignorance, but they become hard-wired by rumour and media influence (in what proportion it's hard to judge) and do not fade easily.



In this class we will look at the way these 'scratches' left their mark on the public mind long after the defeat of the third part of the China equation, the Japanese army and the collapse of the most tangible symbol of the 'New Order in Asia' Manchoukuo [Manshukoku] in 1945, and sixty years after the ousting of Chiang Kai-shek and the unification of China under Mao Tse-Tung in 1949.

A point worth keeping in mind when we discuss the Sino-Japanese War is the time-lag between Western and East Asian controversies. The Nanjing Massacre/Rape controversy was thoroughly aired in Japan in the early 1970s, well ahead of the Western debate ignited in the 1990s by the publication of Nancy Chang's "Rape of Nanking" and the John Rabe Diaries. The Nanjing debate was closely linked and often conflated with the Unit 731 and Comfort Women (Ianfu) issues, both of which had also been hotly debated by opposing intellectual and political factions in Japan in the 1970s, but, as with Nanjing, became prominent in the Western press in the 1990s and have since been resurrected by anniversaries and by the Yasukuni visits issue. All three issues will probably return to haunt the denizens of Nagatacho when the Nanjing 'Incident' reaches its 70th anniversary in December 2007.

More recently, two books have revived public interest in Japan and the West in the 'just war' debate: Jonathan Fenby's (2004) *Chiang Kai-shek: China's Generalissimo and the Nation He Lost* (New York: Carroll & Graf) and Jung Chang and John Halliday's (2005) *Mao: The Unknown Story* (London: Jonathan Cape). Neither leader comes out of these studies with his reputation enhanced, but Chang's book has come in for the heaviest criticism, particularly from the Sinologist Jonathan Spence, more because so many of her historical sources are beyond scrutiny than because there is any substantial disagreement about the essential truth of her book. It is interesting for our purposes that Jung Chang was herself a victim of the Cultural Revolution in 1960s China, which cannot have helped her to see 'the Great Helmsman', as Mao was called, in a positive light, nor Chinese Communism as a just cause. However, although there is far more to her study than mere vengefulness, it is unlikely to dislodge Mao and the CCP from the 'just cause' position they have held since 1949.

2. CHINESE NATIONALISM AND THE GROWTH OF THE GUOMINDANG

In the 1920s, the group of media interests that I have described as the *Japan Advertiser* network ran an effective campaign against Japan's retention of the Shandong leases in China through the May 4th 1919 Movement. May 4th marked the 'day of shame' when news reached China that Japan would retain the Shandong leases, and sparking massive protests, not just against the Japanese but against all foreign interests in China. May 4th became the emotional basis of Chinese nationalism and helped jump-start the Guomindang as a political force: after that date and the mass protests that broke out, China and Chinese aspirations could no longer be ignored by



the foreign powers.

The *Advertiser* network also ran a highly successful campaign against the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, succeeding in bringing it to an end in 1921-22 and in positioning its journalists as China's key spokesmen in Nanking, London and Washington.

In the *Advertiser* network, the main pro-Guomindang journalists,



media entrepreneurs and State Department sympathisers did their utmost to talk up Chiang Kai-shek and Madame Chiang as America's best hope for a united, pro-American China. Among those at the forefront of Guomindang publicity and propaganda were J.B. Powell of the *China Weekly Review*, Randall Gould of the *North-China Daily News* and *Shanghai Evening Post & Mercury*, the American-educated (Columbia) Hollington Tong of the *China Press* (▲ with Clare Booth-Luce Chiang Kai-shek and Madame Chiang) and the China Information Bureau, acting as government advisers and publicists, the Australian ex-journalist W.H. Donald and the American Thomas Millard.

Based in Nanjing and, after 1937, Chongqing, Guomindang publicity efforts were considerably boosted by the unblinking support of the Christian fundamentalist media entrepreneur Henry R. Luce, whose *Time* magazine maintained Chiang Kai-shek's hold on the 'China' brand in the American public mind. At the same time, the *Advertiser* network in China and Japan worked hard to bring Western interests into the Guomindang fold, aided by influential Washington contacts, a horror of Communism and motivated more often than they might care to admit by a visceral distaste for the Japanese as a race.

3. THE SPLIT IN THE ADVERTISER NETWORK: LOOKING TO YAN'AN

These differences led to a split in the ranks of US journalists between those who insisted that the China story was the Guomindang story and those who maintained that the real story of China was not happening in Nanjing or in the new capital of Manchoukuo at Hsinking, but with Mao Tse-Tung and his followers holed up in the caves of Yan'an.

Influenced by military and political advisors from the newly revolutionised Soviet Union, the CCP agreed to cooperate with the Guomindang in ousting both Western interests and Japanese forces from China. The Communists and the Guomindang brokered an uneasy truce which lasted until early 1927, when the Guomindang, with the connivance of the British and the French authorities in Shanghai and Du Yuesheng's Green Gang, turned against their allies in a fortnight of round-ups, torture and the public beheading of CCP cadres.

In the United States in the 1930s, the most influential account of events in China was delivered by the novelist Pearl S. Buck. One of a handful of Chinese reader-speakers among writers on China in these years, Buck's novel *The Good Earth* (1931) became a huge bestseller, a box office hit, won her both the Pulitzer and Nobel prizes, and intensified American sympathies for 'the Chinese' and their representatives in Nanjing. However, while many local British and American newspapers looked the other way in Shanghai in 1927, a small group of American journalists in the *Advertiser* network began to question the morality and tactical wisdom of the Guomindang leadership and the business interests around them in Nanjing. Some US journalists moved closer to the 'Left Guomindang' in Canton. Other left-leaning writers such as Israel 'Eppy' Epstein and Harold Isaacs devoted themselves to exposing the corruption of the 'Gissimo and the Missimo' and the brutality of their secret police in publications such as Isaacs' dynamic 'China Forum' of 1931-32.



In the mid-1930s, a number of American journalists left Shanghai and made the long journey to the CCP stronghold in Yan'an. In 1937, the best known of these, Edgar Snow published his remarkable account, *Red Star Over China*, which contained the first-ever full-length interview with Mao Tse-Tung and marked the beginning of the Maoist myth among Western intellectuals. In the 1930s, these foundations were built on by other American visitors to Yan'an, most notably Agnes Smedley and Anna Louise Strong.

A further division opened in 1938 when Harold Isaacs' *Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution* exposed the role of the CCP in betraying Trotskyites from within their own ranks to a brutal fate in the very Guomindang atrocities he had described in *China Forum* in 1931-32. Isaacs' bitter disillusionment with both the Guomindang and the CCP, and with Snow, Smedley and other 'Stalinist dupes' of the 'Yan'an clique' leaps from the pages of this small but significant corrective.

4. JAPAN IN CHINA: LOSING THE 'JUST WAR', 1931-45

SEE ALSO [HERE](#)

Japan and the Foreign Ministry network campaigned intensely for recognition as the 'just cause' in China in the 1920s and early 1930s, but effectively threw away all chance of victory when Japan walked out of the League of Nations in 1933. After 1933, Japanese propaganda did not try quite as hard to persuade the world of the correctness of its case in China. However, as we have also seen, although only Germany and Italy formally recognised Manchoukuo, the consensus among Western expatriates and opinion in Washington and Whitehall was close to a resigned acceptance of Manchoukuo as a *fait accompli*. Three events turned Western opinion against Japan's presence in China: the Japanese invasion of Shanghai in 1932; the outbreak of full-scale war in July 1937; and third, events following the capture of Nanjing in December 1937.



Those Western observers who had been willing to put up with and even to welcome the establishment of Japanese order in Manchoukuo were less enthusiastic when the Japanese navy began the bombardment and invasion of Shanghai the following January. While there are reports of dinner-jacketed Western observers cheering on Japanese troops from safe vantage points on the rooftops of the International Concession, witnessing and reading about the atrocities committed by these troops on innocent civilian bystanders did much to alter their perception of Japan as a possible saviour of China: in other words, the perception that Japan's cause might be just.

In Shanghai in 1931-32 and after 1937, Guomintang propagandists collected these atrocity photographs and reports and cited them in propaganda pamphlets which they circulated in China and in Western capitals. Invigorated by these atrocities, the *Advertiser* network's *Shanghai Evening Post & Mercury* and *China Weekly Review* gave ample space to events in Nanjing and elsewhere in December 1937. Earlier in this course we discussed the 'killing competition' that was said to have taken place outside Nanjing at that time. In fact, while atrocities certainly did take place Nanjing, the 'killing competition' was probably a fabrication, the result of empty boasts made by one of those said to be involved, Mukai, apparently in order to impress his bride to be.*

Japan's claim to be prosecuting a 'just war' had also been seriously compromised by its military sleight of hand and Foreign Ministry excuses and denials issued following the Manchurian Incident of 18 September 1931, to such an extent that nobody believed its claims in July 1937 that Chinese troops fired the first shots at the Marco Polo Bridge. Once credibility is lost, it is extremely hard to regain. 'The Chinese' whether they fought for the Guomintang or the Communist Party, or for both, inevitably and increasingly gained the moral status of victims in 1931, 1932, 1933 and in 1937. In the early 1940s, even though the United States sent 'Vinegar' Joe Stilwell to advise Chiang Kai-shek (whom he detested and referred to privately as 'the Peanut') a growing consensus in the Western press began to recognise the Communists as those fighting the 'just war' in China after 1937, around the time that Japan focused its firepower and dedicated its best battalions to their destruction, while hoping (not without reason) to agree a separate peace with Chiang Kai-shek and the Guomintang.

*See Wakabayashi, Bob Tadashi (Summer 2000) "The Nanking 100-Man Killing Contest Debate: War Guilt Amid Fabricated Illusions, 1971-75", *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol 26 (2), 307-340.

5. THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION, 1966-76: LI ZHENSHENG'S *RED-COLOR NEWS SOLDIER*, 2006



Top Party officials are denounced during an afternoon-long rally in Harbin's Red Guard Square in August 1966.
Photo by © Li Zhensheng/Contact Press Images.

REVIEW ARTICLE: Jonathan Spence has written that the Cultural Revolution “brought misery” to China for a decade. How do you represent that kind of personal and historic trauma? It seems rather heartless to judge photographs of these events as either compelling or ineffectual. Yet there is a paradox: memorably documenting the misery in history takes an artist who understands his medium. Part of the fascination of this extraordinary collection of photographs is how it struggles with that contradiction.

Given our dependency on photographs to recreate the past, it is surprising that it has taken so long to unearth the pictorial documentation of one of the 20th century's disasters. China's Cultural Revolution paralyzed the country for nearly a decade (1966-76) and left hundreds of thousands dead. Now, nearly thirty years later, Zhensheng's volume makes the catastrophic visible. “Red-Color News Soldier” is made up of 285 photographs, selected from over 60,000 negatives Zhensheng hid under the floorboards of his home, fearing retribution for preserving records of China's infamous past.

When the revolution began in 1964, Zhensheng, a newspaper photographer for the communist-run Heilongjiang Daily, was given the beat in and around the industrial city of Harbin in northern China. He was a party-sanctioned press member, so his photos are the results of rare, first-hand access. In 1966, Mao declared intellectuals and teachers to

be reactionaries; he purged ideas and debate from what was to be a workers' paradise. During a country-wide clampdown, religion, icons of the past, and displays of wealth among the citizens were forbidden. The Red Army, made up of ideologically-entranced teenagers, led the charge as Mao's brutal enforcers of revolution. (Zhensheng admits to organizing his own Red Army group, but in a rather breezy and incomplete confession claims it was a form of protection. There is much more to this part of the story.)

The Cultural Revolution secured Mao's power by way of social anarchy. Indeed, his power was rooted in the uncertainty, fear, and paranoia of revolution generated by his Great Leap Forward, in which some twenty millions died due to a failed experiment in collective farming.

Zhensheng's photographs mix staged propaganda and reportage. The staged pictures feature predictable subjects: young children appear in military uniforms and hold spears as they march in parades; farmers show earnest interest when learning how to plow fields; soldiers wield rifles in military training exercises to prepare for the Japanese, Reds, or Capitalists. The presence of Mao is everywhere in these pictures: in the controlled postures, the little red books, the countless signs, posters, drawings, and paintings of the dictator. These pictures are of interest because of their rarity, but, as propaganda photographs they are flatfooted and uninspiring, especially compared to the dramatic images created by Alexandr Rodchenko in the wake of the Russian revolution.

Zhensheng's most compelling photographs are his more spontaneous records of the Cultural Revolution. They depict the persecution and public humiliation of cultural authorities: Buddhists, intellectuals, and government leaders. Public spectacles and persecutions follow a strict ritual. Men and women stand on spare wooden school chairs, their hands bound behind them. They pitch uncomfortably forward, their heads bowed in disgrace, signs hanging from their necks explaining their guilt. A large, anonymous crowd watches an enemy of the people with expressionless severity.

Composed with an eye for sharp angles, expansive views, and drama, these photographs have an almost cinematic feel. We watch sordid bits of history unfold, frame by frame, scenes of gray, mechanical torture that quickly become unsettling. In this collection, Zhensheng displays his mastery of the art of depicting unspeakable suffering.

