

CHAPTER FOUR

COMMUNISM, CONTAINMENT AND THE CHINESE OVERSEAS

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After 1949, the emerging Cold War imposed global strategic importance on Southeast Asia. The communist revolution in China, followed by the United Nations and Chinese interventions in the Korean War brought the struggle between spreading communism and containing it into the heart of Asia. The countries of Southeast Asia actively sought independence as the Western powers discovered that their continued cooperation remained vital to the reconstruction of Japan and Western Europe, raising anti-colonial, nationalist and communist movements in these countries to international attention.¹

As a result of these developments, the existence of a large ethnic Chinese population in Southeast Asia took on a new importance. In 1950, the “overseas Chinese (*huaqiao*),” as the population was generally called,² made up six percent of the population of Southeast Asia, for a total of approximately 9.6 million people (see Table I). This not only made them a significant minority, but they also controlled a disproportionately large segment of the local national economies. The economic power of the Chinese diaspora was profoundly important to both the Republic of China (ROC) and the People’s Republic of China (PRC), where it represented remittances, investment and a source of foreign exchange. Added to this were the diaspora’s cultural, linguistic and familial ties to China, which together raised alarm about the loyalties of the overseas Chinese in the 1950s.

¹ The link between Japanese reconstruction and the US policy of containment in Southeast Asia is demonstrated in Michael Schaller, “Securing the Great Crescent: Occupied Japan and the Origins of Containment in Southeast Asia,” *Journal of American History* 69, 2 (September 1982): 392–414.

² The term “overseas Chinese” is notoriously problematic. The term as it was used in the era under consideration generally included anyone of Chinese heritage living outside of China, regardless of local citizenship. Host governments, however, frequently objected to either Chinese government “claiming” their citizens as Chinese nationals, and arguments over citizenship and dual nationality were not infrequent. In this essay, I use the term the way the government organizations involved used it, but acknowledge that different groups count the population in different ways.

Table I: Estimate of Overseas Chinese Population in Southeast Asia, Dec. 1950³

Country	Chinese Population	Total Population	% Chinese
Thailand	3,000,000	18,000,000	16.7
Malaya	2,008,000	5,235,000	38.4
Singapore	790,000	1,011,000	78.1
Indonesia	2,100,000	72,000,000	2.9
Vietnam	750,000	24,000,000	3.1
Cambodia and Laos	250,000	3,500,000	7.1
Burma	300,000	17,500,000	1.7
Philippines	230,000	20,000,000	1.2
Sarawak and Brunei	162,000	550,000	29.4
North Borneo	70,000	320,000	21.9
Total	9,660,000	162,116,000	6.0

The previous half-century had proven that when aroused, the diaspora could be active in its support of the ancestral homeland; it had also created a solid precedent for activist government work on behalf of Chinese interests abroad. Trying to win the hearts and minds of the overseas Chinese therefore became instrumental to the achievement of foreign policy goals for the United States, ROC and PRC, and to how they related to one another. Recent work in the history of the Cold War has turned to the issue of public diplomacy as a major source of inquiry; both historians and international relations theorists are examining the campaigns that were conducted primarily through information operations and what came to be known as “psychological warfare.” Although the battle for the loyalties and attentions of the captive peoples of Eastern Europe has received the most scholarly attention, there was also an ongoing propaganda battle in Asia.⁴ The struggle for the support of the overseas Chinese is particularly interesting because the audience was pulled at least three ways; though

³ G. William Skinner, *Report on the Chinese in Southeast Asia* (New York: Cornell University Department of Far Eastern Studies, 1950), 79.

⁴ See Yale Richmond, *Practicing Public Diplomacy: A Cold War Odyssey* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008); Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945–1961* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997); Nicholas Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945–1989* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Alexander Stephen, *The Americanization of Europe: Culture, Diplomacy, and Anti-Americanism after 1945* (Boston: Berghahn Books, 2005).

technically allies, US and ROC goals and priorities in the region were not always the same, and host governments often added their voices in opposition to both communist and containment themes.⁵ In other words, as noted by other scholars in this volume, the conflict in Asia was far from bipolar.

The propaganda war that raged through the 1950s finally began to decline as the United States and People's Republic found that their attention to the Chinese diaspora began to damage their respective relations with the Southeast Asian governments, and as Southeast Asian governments pursued policies to promote Chinese assimilation in their territories. In the turn toward promoting assimilation into local societies in the late 1950s, US and PRC goals were suddenly far more compatible than those of the United States and the ROC. Moreover, American and mainland Chinese organizations realized they could not continue to address the overseas Chinese as a unified diaspora with shared interests and goals or easily manipulated ties to either Chinese government.

Competing Propaganda Themes

At the outset, the United States, PRC and ROC all based the attention they directed at the overseas Chinese during the early 1950s on the fundamental idea that the Chinese abroad maintained a connection with the Chinese homeland—that whether for ethnic, cultural, familial or financial reasons, the overseas Chinese cared enough about China to act in a way that would support whatever was best for the country. The policies the three governments stressed and the themes they promoted in pursuit of this population differed and reflected broader issues in each nation's foreign policy during the decade.

Immediately after its victory in 1949, the government established by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was widely celebrated within the overseas communities. A strong China, a China that had “finally stood

⁵ As noted by Hong Liu in “The Historicity of China's Soft Power: The PRC and the Cultural Politics of Indonesia, 1945–1965” (in this volume), propaganda efforts originating from PRC bureaus were sometimes aimed at both local Indonesian audiences and overseas Chinese simultaneously, complicating the picture of a simple fight for diaspora loyalty.

up” and which was prepared to fight back against national humiliations and defend the interests of overseas citizens had long been a dream for maligned nationals abroad. The People’s Republic lost some of the initial support from the diaspora, however, during the crises of faith caused by land reform policies that categorized returned overseas Chinese and overseas Chinese families as landlords or rich peasants; rumours of efforts by local officials in Guangdong Province to use captive relatives to extort funds from those residing abroad; and anti-communist efforts to capitalize on PRC mistakes. In the wake of these events early in the decade, PRC propaganda policies focused attention on regaining overseas Chinese confidence and enthusiasm.⁶ It also aimed at re-establishing the role of the Chinese Communist government as the protector of the Chinese abroad, the guardian of the Chinese culture and language worldwide and the only true government of China.

PRC overseas Chinese policies as articulated by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission (OCAC), a bureau within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Central People’s Government, fell into two categories: internal and external. Internal information campaigns were directed at returned migrants, families with members living abroad, and students returning for study; external work focused on Chinese communities overseas. In 1951, broad themes for both internal and external work included opposing the United States in the Korean War, explaining land reform, and extolling the success of efforts to suppress counterrevolutionaries. The first two years of internally-directed propaganda work also focused on incorporating family members and returned overseas Chinese into the socialist project; advertising the

⁶ Scholars divide the development of the PRC’s overseas Chinese policy into four periods: the years from 1949 to 1955 (when the Sino-Indonesian Treaty on Dual Nationality was signed) were marked by the competition with the ROC for diaspora loyalty; 1955–1966 was the era of peaceful co-existence; from 1966 to 1972 the Cultural Revolution drove the Chinese Communist Party to make attempts at exporting revolution; finally, after 1972 focus returned to accommodation, though efforts increased again to promote investment. For a complete discussion of way overseas Chinese policies were formed and carried out in the People’s Republic, see Stephen Fitzgerald, *China and the Overseas Chinese: A Study of Peking’s Changing Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 1–11. See also Milton Easmen, “The Chinese Diaspora in Southeast Asia,” in *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*, ed. Gabriel Sheffer (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986), 130–163; and Theresa Chong Carino, *China and the Overseas Chinese of Southeast Asia* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1985).

ways remittances could be made; explaining investment opportunities; providing relief for poor returned overseas Chinese and refugees; improving education for people with overseas Chinese ties; working with local gazetteers to get news circulated through the villages; and establishing domestic overseas Chinese service offices. Meanwhile, overseas information work in the same period focused on five points: unifying the patriotic overseas Chinese; exposing attacks on the overseas Chinese by Chiang Kai-shek's government; protecting the rights of the Chinese living abroad (including their ability to send remittances, but also protecting them against local discriminations and violence and opening immigration opportunities); promoting cultural and language education abroad; and improving relations between the overseas Chinese and the local societies in which they lived.⁷

As the PRC focused on these points, the United States and ROC suspected the CCP of attempting to utilize the overseas Chinese as a fifth column for communism in the region. A combination of this evidence of interest in the overseas Chinese, the extortion problem and international events such as the Chinese intervention in the Korean War in 1950 only served to feed this perspective. The ROC's own history of relying upon the overseas Chinese for support in both the 1911 revolution and the War of Resistance against Japan affirmed the potentially vital role the overseas Chinese could play in the struggle between the ROC and the PRC.

After the release of National Security Council Paper 68 in 1950, US foreign policy became focused on preventing the spread of communism. This policy of containment provided the foundation upon which the US built up propaganda efforts to discredit communism and the PRC while promoting the ideology of the Free World and support for the ROC. As early as 1946, the US government took an interest in potential difficulties related to the Chinese minority in Southeast Asia. An intelligence report stated that the overseas Chinese "represent an important tool that China might use in extending its economic and

⁷ 235/2/3-125, Zhongyang renmin zhengfu huaqiao shiwu weiyuanhui cheng li yi lai de gongzuo zong jie yu dang qian qiaowu gongzuo de fangzhen, Renwu yu jihua, Zhongyang renmin zhengfu huaqiao shiwu weiyuanhui di yi ci qiao wu kuoda huiyi [Documents sent over on the guiding principles, mission and plans of recent overseas Chinese work since the founding of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission of the Central People's Government; First mass meeting of the Central People's Government's Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission], 26 June 1951, Guangdong Provincial Archive, Guangzhou, PRC [hereafter, "Guangzhou"].

political influence in Southeast Asia,” and expressed concern that the issue of overseas Chinese dual nationality might eventually require United Nations intervention.⁸ If these Chinese were turned into a fifth column to advocate local communist revolutions, or convinced to use their economic power to support the communist machine, then the entire region would fall, endangering US security and foreign policy interests, not to mention weakening US allies in the region like the ROC, Japan and South Korea.

The United States government developed its perception of the kinds of opportunities for winning the Cold War that existed in the Chinese communities of Southeast Asia from several sources, including the experiences noted by the ROC, the dispatches from US Embassies and Consulates, and the writings of scholars who worked on the region. Cornell University anthropologist G. William Skinner travelled through Southeast Asia in early 1950, and his report concluded that:

The average Nanyang [Southeast Asian] Chinese with political consciousness is a fence-sitter who tends to consider the Chinese People's Republic his government (insofar as any non-local government is 'his'), and who hopes and expects that the strong and united regime in [Beijing] will give him more protection and cause for pride than any other Chinese government of his time. He is not Communist, however, not even pro-Communist as contrasted with pro-[Beijing]. Enlightened policies and practice on the part of non-Communist forces can still induce the vast majority of Southeast Asian Chinese to travel the roads toward freedom and democracy.⁹

Skinner discussed his findings with the Office of Chinese Affairs in the US State Department, and the report was also considered by the United States Information Agency (USIA) when it was established in 1953 to help these US government entities decide what kinds of propaganda would be most effective for combating the communist threat in Chinese communities. In his report, Skinner suggested three themes as particularly important for the overseas Chinese audience:

⁸ Central Intelligence Group, “Chinese Minorities in Southeast Asia” (ORE-7), 2 Dec. 1946. Records of the United States Central Intelligence Agency, Freedom of Information Act Reading Room, [on-line], www.cia.gov: accessed 12 Nov. 2004, 7.

⁹ Skinner, *Report on the Chinese in Southeast Asia*, 88. Skinner's report was commissioned by the Department of Far Eastern Studies at Cornell University, then reproduced for the benefit of “other interested parties,” which included the Office of Chinese Affairs in the US Department of State.

the situation of business in China and the incompatibility of the new society on the mainland with capitalistic ventures, the lack of democracy in the new China and the question of Russian infringement over Chinese territorial and sovereign rights.¹⁰ As the American Embassy in Manila noted, “The Chinese communists, through terrorism at home and subversive activities abroad, are organizing all Chinese in support of their regime and they are increasingly successful in this because they meet no organized opposition.” It would be incumbent upon the US and ROC to work to combat these activities, “unless we are willing to see the Chinese of Southeast Asia mobilized as a Communist fifth column.”¹¹ The way to prevent this potential future was through a large-scale and well-coordinated information program.¹²

State Department ideas about the overseas Chinese were based on a few stereotypes about the population, including the idea that everyone shared certain important characteristics: they all experienced discrimination in their places of residence that required assistance to combat, they would always consider China their true home no matter how many generations removed from the mainland they were and they desired a strong Chinese government to act on their behalf.¹³ Beyond the obvious issue that there was quite a range of opinions on these points—even within families, much less the worldwide population—convincing the overseas Chinese that the ROC could fulfill these particular needs would be a major challenge. By May of 1952, the United States Information Service (USIS) had developed a general plan for reaching the overseas Chinese which incorporated Skinner’s ideas and suggested that the short-term goal be convincing the overseas Chinese that support of the Beijing government would not benefit them and

¹⁰ Memo of Conversation, 2 Feb. 1951, Reel 24, Frames 293–5, MF C0012, Archives II.

¹¹ [signature illegible] to Dean Rusk, 9 Aug. 1951, Reel 22, Frames 746–7, MF C0012, Archives II.

¹² The US propaganda program in the 1950s is addressed more broadly in Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower’s Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2006); Richard J. Aldrich et al., eds., *The Clandestine Cold War in Asia: Western Intelligence, Propaganda and Special Operations* (London: Frank Cass, 2000); a contemporary assessment of the importance of propaganda in the Cold War comes from Richard L. Brecker, “Truth as a Weapon in the Free World,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 278 (Nov. 1951), 1–11.

¹³ “China in Relation to Southeast Asia,” memorandum, Office of Chinese Affairs contribution to policy paper, 20 Feb. 1951, Reel 17, RG 59, Archives II.

that the free world was strong and would ultimately triumph.¹⁴ The long-term goal would be convincing the overseas Chinese to integrate fully into their societies of residence. This theme of promoting assimilation became the baseline of all US policies concerning the Chinese diaspora, though the American agencies charged with applying the policy constantly struggled with how to implement it.¹⁵

The USIS formalized its ideas about the potential value of the Chinese diaspora to create an overseas Chinese policy, which sought to deny the overseas Chinese to the Chinese communists; encourage the diaspora to identify their interests with those of their countries of residence; and ensure that they look to the ROC on Taiwan for leadership and sources of cultural or ethnic pride. By 1953, the US was receiving reports from the region that the combination of the extortion scandal, dissatisfaction over land reform, and local government controls designed to limit the spread of communism had stemmed the tide of rising pro-PRC sentiment. The challenge emerging for the US and the ROC in the years that followed was to prevent it from surging again, and if at all possible to diminish support for the communist government.¹⁶

The ROC government naturally also ran its own propaganda machine, though American partners criticized their productions as tending to be “more concerned with denouncing enemies than persuading friends.”¹⁷ As time wore on without the ROC launching a major offensive to retake the mainland, its very legitimacy in the eyes of both the overseas Chinese and the outside world was called into question. Because American support and recognition of the ROC as the true Chinese government was vital to its very existence, for much of the decade the ROC directed a significant proportion of its information work at the people of the United States.¹⁸

¹⁴ The USIS was established in World War II as the overseas branch of the Office of War Information; after the establishment of the USIA in 1953, it became the overseas branch of that organization. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 2.

¹⁵ “USIS Plan for Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia,” 28 May 1952, Folder: Book Translation Program, Box 1, USIS HK 1951–55, RG 84, Archives II.

¹⁶ “US Problems among Overseas Chinese in East Asia,” 29 Sept. 1953, Reel 34, Frames 196–202, MF C0012, Archives II. There is also a short treatment of overseas Chinese propaganda efforts in Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 121–123.

¹⁷ Arthur Hummel to Saxton Bradford, 3 Aug. 1954, Folder: Far East—Research Needs, Box 1, FE 1954–56, RG 306, Archives II.

¹⁸ 707.5/0015, Inspection Report USIS Taiwan, 3–7 April 1956, Folder: Taiwan, Box 9, FE 1954–56, RG 306, Archives II; Haiwai xin zhan xiao zu, di ba ci huiyi

For the Republic of China, the period from 1949 to 1953 was one of regrouping, adjusting past policies to changed circumstances. The ROC Constitution contained three major themes related to overseas Chinese, including the idea that their protection was a major function of the government's foreign policy; that providing encouragement and assistance in their education was a responsibility of the government; and that the state should assist overseas Chinese in their efforts at economic development where necessary. In 1951, the ROC revised its formal overseas Chinese policy to meet the new demands of the times. The new "Oppose Communism, Resist Russia (*fan gong kang e*)" policy included calling upon overseas Chinese in those countries that had recognized the PRC (Burma and Indonesia) to devise ways to protect their legal rights, granting the right of return to "Free China" if abused by communists in their land of abode, and promising to restore the faith of the overseas Chinese in the ROC government. In 1952, the Legislative Yuan added further measures, such as encouraging overseas Chinese students to go to Taiwan to study and take part in anti-communist training activities and implementing relief measures for refugees in Hong Kong and Macao. Actually, the ROC was not alone in linking the emerging refugee crisis in Hong Kong with the overseas Chinese; the USIS also considered a variety of ways to make the exodus from China influence the opinions of the overseas Chinese, including refugee interviews for radio broadcasts and relocating refugees to act as teachers and leaders in existing overseas Chinese communities.¹⁹

In 1952, the ROC convened the Overseas Chinese Affairs Conference. The Conference brought together 240 delegates from overseas Chinese communities around the world to discuss the situation of both the diaspora and the ROC government. The fiery rhetoric at the conference highlighted an early goal of utilizing overseas Chinese resources (both finances and manpower) to facilitate an early return to the mainland. The OCAC Chairman, Cheng Yen-fen, acknowledged to his audience that the difficult circumstances following the civil war

yicheng, Zhongyang weiyuanhui di er huiyi yishi [Overseas psywar small group, the 8th meeting agenda, central committee second meeting], 24 Dec. 1955, Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Taipei, Taiwan, ROC [hereafter "MOFA Taipei"].

¹⁹ 462.2 (part of File 460.1/0002), Xingxian yi lai de huaqiao shizheng [Overseas Chinese administration since the promulgation of the constitution] Taipei: Qiaowu weiyuanhui, 1954, MOFA Taipei; "Escapee Program Submission, FY1954," Reel 25, Frames 224–257, MF C0012, Archives II.

meant that the government was forced to rely on its overseas citizens more than usual, but that did not mean that services in the areas of education and economic power would be curtailed.

Beyond declaring each October 21st “Overseas Chinese Day,” the conference adopted a four-point program designed to promote closer ties between overseas Chinese and the ROC: the government vowed to protect overseas Chinese interests (including in countries recognizing the PRC), to encourage unity and anti-communist work, to promote education and increase opportunities for students to return home to study and to assist overseas Chinese with investing in Free China. The conference concluded with pledges to enforce economic sanctions against the communists, start fundraising for the planned counterattack against the mainland and increase cooperation with governments of residence.²⁰ Information programs were at the heart of all of these goals. As an overseas Chinese correspondent from New York wrote to ROC Foreign Minister George Yeh, “In the cold and hot war in which we find ourselves, diplomacy has become nine parts propaganda, goodwill cultivation and resort to psychological measures.”²¹

The Information War in Southeast Asia: News and Media

Though specific goals differed for the governments, all three nations spent much of the 1950s flooding the Chinese communities in Southeast Asia with books, movies, radio shows, comic books, photographs and news stories, spreading the gospel of the communist or free world agenda in the Cold War.

²⁰ The conference also created a new organization, the Overseas Chinese National Salvation Association, which would use both overt and covert operations to gain support for Free China, though British observers noted the following year that the only known branch was in New York. See “Overseas Chinese Affairs Conference,” Chinese Secretariat, Singapore, 25 March 1953, Foreign Office [hereafter FO] File 371/105340, Public Records Office, Kew, London, UK [hereafter, “PRO”]. On the conference itself, see Telegram, American Embassy Taipei to Secretary of State, 24 Oct. 1952, Folder 360.01 Overseas Chinese, Box 9, Taipei Embassy General Records, 1950–1952, RG 84, Archives II; 462.2 (part of File 460.1/0002, Xingxian yi lai de huaqiao shizheng [Overseas Chinese administration since the promulgation of the constitution] (Taipei: Qiaowu weiyuanhui, 1954), MOFA Taipei, 4–5.

²¹ Letter, N.C. Nyi to Minister George K.C. Yeh, 28 Dec. 1954, File 707.5/0059, MOFA Taipei.

Planting unattributed news articles and information in popular newspapers was one of the primary methods of spreading propaganda messages abroad for all three governments. This method was particularly effective because it promoted desirable themes without automatically revealing the political motivations behind them. In 1950, the total circulation of Chinese language newspapers in Southeast Asia added up to around 325,000–340,000. According to Skinner’s survey, “for every reader of Communist organs or pro-Communist dailies, there are two readers of papers which are less rabidly communist but still ardently pro-[Beijing], three readers of neutral papers with a pro-[Beijing] slant, two readers of really neutral papers, one reader of neutral papers with a pro-KMT slant, and three readers of KMT organs and ardently pro-KMT papers.” In terms of circulation, there were 65,600 copies of truly neutral papers in circulation, 102,700 copies of papers slightly or completely supportive of the ROC, and 162,500 copies of papers slightly or completely in support of the Chinese communists. Skinner suggested that although newspaper editorial policy was not a perfect indicator of political views, it did seem that pride in the new government swayed many opinions.²²

Pro-communist and progressive newspapers naturally looked to fill out their news pages with stories from Hong Kong newspapers like *Ta Kung Pao* (*Da Gong Bao*) and *Wen Wei Po* (*Wen Hui Bao*), which as Lu Yan has shown were solidly left-leaning in tone in the years following 1949.²³ In spite of the sometimes-controversial nature of their editorial lines in Hong Kong, however, both papers were sometimes less controversial news sources in non-communist areas overseas than the mainland party organ, the *People’s Daily* (*Renmin Ribao*). As a result, as long as information placed in these Hong Kong newspapers catered toward the center and did not sound too revolutionary in tone, it could potentially reach audiences across the overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia and the Americas. By focusing the materials on patriotism and a shared love of the Chinese homeland and not addressing internal campaigns at all, the PRC could avoid having internal

²² These Chinese could still be “turned” to support the Free World, but the loss of the mainland and the squandering of political capital through corruption and bad governance had weakened the Nationalist position. Skinner, *Report on the Chinese in Southeast Asia*, 87–88.

²³ See Lu Yan, “Limits to Propaganda: Hong Kong’s Leftist Media in the Cold War and Beyond,” in this volume.

Chinese politics being misunderstood by those living abroad. Similarly, articles did not oppose capitalist thought outright, because most overseas Chinese lived in countries with capitalist economic systems and many were involved in entrepreneurial activities. It was not important to get the entire diaspora behind every domestic policy; as long as it was opposed to Chiang Kai-shek and willing to support Chairman Mao Zedong that was enough.²⁴

The PRC's Overseas Chinese Broadcasting and Editorial Department (*Huaqiao guangbo bianji bu*—a division of Xinhua News Agency in the Propaganda Department of the CCP) reported great success in getting its articles into left-leaning or “progressive” (*jinbu*) and centrist (*zhongjian*) overseas Chinese newspapers. During a two-month period early in 1954, the Department put out a total of 648 articles. Examining 29 overseas Chinese newspapers, 623 or 95.6 percent of the articles were used. Centrist newspapers used about 30 percent of the articles (186), and progressive papers used the other 70 percent (434). Newspapers in Indonesia, Burma and Hong Kong made the greatest use of the articles, but editors in India, South Africa and Malaya printed them as well. Two newspapers in North America, the *Chinese Times* (*Da Han Gong Bao*) and the *China Daily News* (*Huaqiao Ribao*), used a combined total of 68 pieces. The articles covered a diverse range of issues, but most dealt with either the development of the mainland (labor, transportation, farming, etc.) or the current conditions in the overseas Chinese areas of China. Of the 257 articles dealing with politics and development of these areas, 208 found placement in one or more of the surveyed newspapers. A smaller number of more general pieces on the war in Korea, China's foreign relations and party elections also found placement abroad.²⁵

Meanwhile, USIS also worked to counteract this success rate by placing articles supporting its own ideology in sympathetic newspapers. Because Chinese-language newspapers in the region often operated on a low budget, well-written articles on issues of interest to the

²⁴ 204/3/16–113, Zhong xuan bu, Zhong qiao dui Xiang Gang xuanchuan gong-zuo fang zhen zhengce de zhishi [Central propaganda bureau, Central Overseas Chinese section instructions on guiding principles of policy for propaganda work in Hong Kong], August 1952, Guangzhou.

²⁵ Huaqiao baozhi he Xianggang baozhi caiyong huaqiao guangbo gao qingkuang de diaocha baogao [Investigation Report of the Use of Articles by the Overseas Chinese Broadcasting Agency in Overseas Chinese Newspapers and Hong Kong Newspapers], Nov. 1954, National Library of China, Beijing, PRC.

Chinese audience abroad were quite welcome. USIS focused on articles that addressed the nature of communist rule in China, though it also included articles that dealt with the overseas Chinese across the region and education for Chinese students.²⁶ In 1959, the USIS office in Hong Kong reported that 90 percent of the articles it had a hand in creating for distribution through news services were being picked up by Chinese-language newspapers.²⁷ That number sounds impressive, but the success of the placements depended largely on the needs of the individual country. In Singapore, the press was sophisticated enough not to require pieces offered by USIS, though that post's inspection report for 1959 credited the USIS dispatches for the only information available locally that presented the non-communist perspective on world events.²⁸

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the struggles in non-communist regimes in Indochina (South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos) captivated the attention of US officials, so USIS began making extra efforts to reach the Chinese community in these countries. In 1959, USIS reported that Saigon newspapers picked up about 25 percent of the articles they made available, that they were feeding information to the only non-communist newspaper in Cambodia and that they were fighting to keep a new Chinese daily in Vientiane out of communist control.²⁹ Rather than limiting their project to the placement of articles, in some places USIS became actively engaged in founding non-communist newspapers. Overtly anti-communist or pro-KMT papers quickly folded in some communities, so in those areas newly-created newspapers "made no overt attempts to beat the drums for the GRC cause, or to indulge in local 'name-calling,' which was the weakness

²⁶ Arthur W. Hummel to Saxton E. Bradford, 3 August 1954, Folder: Far East—Research Needs, Box 1, Area Project Correspondence, Records of the United States Information Agency (hereafter USIA), RG 306, Archives II.

²⁷ Inspection Report, USIS Hong Kong, 3 Nov. 1959, Folder: Hong Kong, Box 4, Inspection Reports, USIA, RG 306, Archives II.

²⁸ Inspection Report, USIS Singapore, 2 May 1959, Folder: Singapore, Box 8, Inspection Reports, USIA, RG 306, Archives II.

²⁹ Foreign Service Despatch, Saigon to Washington, 20 April 1959, "USIS Program on American Aid to Vietnam," Folder: Asia (2 of 4), Box 2, Foreign Service Despatches, USIA, RG 306, Archives II; Foreign Service Despatch, Phnom Penh to Washington, 15 Oct. 1959, "Country Plan for Cambodia FY1960," Folder: Asia (1 of 5), Box 3, Foreign Service Despatches, USIA, RG 306, Archives II; Foreign Service Despatch, Vientiane to Washington, 31 July 1959, "Country Plan for Laos FY1960," Folder: Asia (1 of 5), Box 3, Foreign Service Despatches, USIA, RG 306, Archives II.

of [KMT] papers in Cambodia in the past.” In more receptive places, USIS built overtly pro-KMT papers, such as one in Phnom Penh that it celebrated as a risk “amply rewarded when the anti-communist elements were galvanized into providing concrete, financial support for [the] paper.” The articles in that paper came almost entirely from the USIS news service.³⁰

The ROC had its own news service as well, and it also engaged in efforts to establish and support sympathetic newspapers in Southeast Asia through its own Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission and the Central Propaganda Department of the KMT. Both entities had less money to spare for such efforts after 1949 but still devoted what money they could to support party newspapers in the region and establish new papers in cities where it did not yet have an established voice.³¹ When important events occurred, the KMT overseas news service distributed outlines explaining what happened and how newspapers should present the information to adhere to the party line. In 1954, they distributed such outlines 72 times, in addition to the regular work of making draft articles and photographs available. Additionally, the KMT took other measures to ensure the quality of overseas newspapers, including providing new sets of typeface to papers experiencing a decline in print quality and sending party editors to struggling papers to educate the local staff.³²

³⁰ Foreign Service Despatch, Phnom Penh to Washington, 28 Jan. 1961, “Country Assessment Report—1960,” Folder: Asia (4 of 5), Box 3, Foreign Service Despatches, USIA, RG 206, Archives II.

³¹ In 1955, a KMT meeting on Southeast Asian overseas Chinese resulted in a plan to establish a party newspaper in Bangkok, a project to which the committee allocated \$11,000 and budgeted an additional \$15,000 to support existing newspapers over the course of the next twelve months. Hui 7.3/190, Zhongguo Kuomintang di qi jie zhongyang weiyuanhui changwu weiyuanhui di yisiliu ci huiyi jilu, “Zuijin Dongnanya qiaoqing baogao” [Chinese Kuomintang Seventh Central Committee, business committee 146th meeting record: “Report on the recent circumstances of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia”], Archives of the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party), Taipei, Taiwan, ROC [hereafter Kuomintang]. One of the greatest liabilities for ROC propaganda work in the diaspora was its inability to either retake the mainland or set a reasonable date for when the conquest might begin. Loyal supporters of the KMT treated the Communist government as a temporary inconvenience, and expected the ROC government to make plans and arrangements to return.

³² Hui 7.3/227, Zhongguo Kuomintang di qi jie zhongyang weiyuanhui changwu weiyuanhui di yibaling ci huiyi jilu, “Jiaqiang haiwai xuanchuan gongzuo zhibanli qingxing yu jinhou jihua” [Chinese Kuomintang Seventh Central Committee, business committee 180th meeting record, “Improving overseas propaganda work current situation and future plans”], Kuomintang.

News clippings services were an important way for both sides of the Cold War to publish their perspectives on world events, but in some countries Chinese-language newspapers were only read in major cities, and then only by community leaders. Other strategies were necessary to reach the wider audience. Both sides employed a wide variety of information materials such as radio broadcasts, films, magazines and novels to spread their messages in the overseas Chinese communities.

By the mid 1950s, the central function of the USIS in Hong Kong (and, to a lesser extent, USIS Taiwan) was to produce print materials to influence and “win” the overseas Chinese audience. One major project was the commissioning or optioning of novels with a subtly anti-communist theme from Hong Kong authors (the Hong Kong staff declared themselves “quite genuinely” proud to have had connection with one such novel, Eileen Chang’s *The Rice-Sprout Song*).³³ Another great pride of the service was the creation of the widely-read magazine *World Today*, which had the “largest circulation of any Chinese magazine outside of Communist China.”³⁴ Arthur Hummel, the Public Affairs Officer at the Hong Kong post from 1952 to 1955, called *World Today* “our greatest coup,” noting it was so well-received it paid for its own production out of sales.³⁵ As Michael Charney has noted in the case of *The People Win Through* in Burma, anti-communist propaganda projects were not limited to print materials.³⁶ One report mentions the Hong Kong post having produced an entire Chinese opera with an interwoven propaganda theme for broadcast in Vietnam. Special projects like the opera combined with screenings of carefully-selected films from Hong Kong and Taiwan.³⁷ The ROC had a healthy propaganda department as well, as a central committee meeting of

³³ The novel is also referred to as “another USIS baby.” Letter Richard M. McCarthy to B. Frank Steiner, 12 July 1954, Folder: Book Translation Project, Box 1, USIS HK 1951–55, RG 84, Archives II.

³⁴ Inspection Report, USIS Hong Kong, 3 Nov. 1959, Folder: Hong Kong, Box 1, Area Project Correspondence, Far East, 1954–63 (FE 1954–56), Box 1, Folder: Hong Kong, Records of the United States Information Agency RG 306, Archives II.

³⁵ ADST Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, interview with Arthur Hummel by Charles Stuart Kennedy, 13 April 1994, transcript in Lauinger Library Special Collections, Georgetown University, Washington, DC.

³⁶ See Michael Charney, “U Nu, China, and the ‘Burmese’ Cold War: Propaganda in Burma in the 1950s,” in this volume.

³⁷ Foreign Service Despatch, Saigon to Washington, 24 August 1955, Country Plan for Vietnam, Folder: Asia (2 of 4), Box 2, Foreign Service Despatches, USIA, RG 306, Archives II.

the KMT reported that in addition to publishing a monthly magazine, in 1954 alone it produced 82 separate films that were shown 221 times, 156 radio shorts broadcast 715 times, and distributed more than 670,000 books to overseas Chinese organizations.³⁸

Americans engaged in overseas Chinese propaganda work noted with some degree of envy the success of pro-communist comic books. Having been, in many cases, born and raised abroad, often in locations where restrictions existed on the availability of Chinese schools, overseas Chinese literacy levels were sometimes too low to make novels and newspapers an attractive way of reaching deep into the community. This problem led to efforts to develop “Story Papers,” illustrated stories in a tabloid format with no obvious propaganda themes or USIS attribution.³⁹ At the same time, comic book libraries were an established tradition—the shop owner bought an entire series, and then individuals came in and paid by the hour or the volume to read them on-site. Comics originating with the PRC in the early 1950s included interesting stories and well-integrated propaganda themes, and therefore achieved popularity. American attempts to match their success were often inadequate—too “Western” in appearance, too heavy-handed in their message. Part of the problem was that the US had a tendency to translate comics intended for European audiences into Chinese, but the traditional formats in Europe and Asia were quite different.⁴⁰

In addition to standard information work, the PRC held one profound advantage over the combined efforts of the ROC and the United States, as it could make use of the personal testimony of individuals in China writing letters to friends and family abroad. Letters could work both ways, of course. They could be filled with praise for equality, democracy and a better life under the new government, but they could also contain tales of extortion, hardship and misery. Chinese documents from the Overseas Chinese Affairs branch office in Guangzhou in the 1950s make frequent reference to letter-writing as a part of their

³⁸ Hui 7.3/227, Kuomintang. In addition to Southeast Asia, the KMT broadcast Cantonese radio programs in North America and distributed books and pamphlets in the United States.

³⁹ Inspection Report of USIS Hong Kong, 6–9 June 1955, Folder: Hong Kong, Box 4, Inspection Reports, USIA, RG 206, Archives II. The ROC also decided to get into the comic contest in mid-1955.

⁴⁰ Evaluation Memorandum, “Cartoon Books in Hong Kong,” distributed 5 Nov. 1951, Folder: Book Translation Program, Box 1, Records of the United States Information Service (hereafter USIS), Hong Kong Consulate, RG 84, Archives II.

propaganda plan, and as an overseas Chinese host government, US officials noticed two incidences of what they suspected were specific, organized campaigns in letter writing—the first was a call for remittances linked to the blackmail scandal circa 1950–1952. The second was a part of what the US Immigration and Naturalization Service dubbed the “Re-defector Program” around 1955–1956, in which letters focused on encouraging Chinese residing in the United States, often students, to return to China. These two campaigns aside, letter-writing was an ongoing practice, and by 1955 officials in Southern China estimated that friends and family members and overseas Chinese exchanged 500,000 letters a month. For the CCP Propaganda Department, making use of this correspondence to promote the government’s agenda and draw in foreign exchange via remittances was both a political necessity and a unique opportunity.⁴¹ This was one major reason why propaganda outlining the government’s ideas and merits had to be aimed at both communities abroad and the overseas Chinese areas in Guangdong and Fujian provinces.

In spite of this PRC advantage, both the ROC and the PRC tried to make use of personal contacts, often by promoting visits from Chinese abroad to see the quality of life under their respective regimes. The PRC’s OCAC arranged tours for Chinese returning for visits or vacations, set up special hotels and receiving centers for Chinese visiting from abroad, and in countries where the PRC had established diplomatic relations, used its Embassy and Consulates to arrange events or activities like celebrations of National Day on October 1. In some cases, Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai and party cadres traveled to visit the overseas Chinese, and this way they could create another avenue for bringing messages about China to citizens abroad.⁴² In the wake of the refugee movements of 1949–1950, the ROC was closed to visitors, but as officials there realized the propaganda value of inviting in overseas Chinese leaders, they worked to make visits to Taiwan easier as well. In countries recognizing the ROC, Nationalist Chinese

⁴¹ 204/3/59–129, Zhonggong zhangyang hua nan fen ju xuanchuan bu zhishi, Guanyu jia qiang dui huaqiao, Qiaojuan xuanchuan gong zuo de zhishi [Chinese Communist central south China branch propaganda department instructions, instructions related to improving propaganda directed at overseas Chinese and overseas Chinese families], 19 March 1955, Guangzhou.

⁴² Fitzgerald, *China and the Overseas Chinese*, 45–50.

and ROC consulates celebrated the October 10th or “Double Tens” national holiday across Asia.⁴³

The PRC seemed to be making such inroads in terms of its propaganda program that a tour of Southeast Asian nations by a US official in 1956 yielded a report that claimed the region was “flooded with Red Chinese literature and consumer goods.”⁴⁴ To combat PRC efforts to gain overseas Chinese investments and curry favor through cheap manufactures, the US Government’s International Cooperation Administration (ICA) began helping the ROC to develop its own commodity exports and economic programs to increase overseas Chinese interest and investment (both personal and financial) in the Taiwanese economy.

In 1956 the ROC government approached the US with its own economic strategy, including both plans for combating communist control of Asian economic life and specific proposals involving overseas Chinese, like the establishment of a banking corporation to help them invest wisely at home and abroad.⁴⁵ The economic offensive included support of the US-led embargo against communist China, encouraging overseas investments in Taiwan, promoting trade between overseas

⁴³ Foreign Service Despatch 242, American Embassy Taipei to Secretary of State, 27 Oct. 1953, “OCAC Accomplishments During the Past Year,” Folder 360.01 Overseas Chinese, Box 18, Taiwan Embassy General Records, 1955–1964, RG 84, Archives II; and Foreign Service Despatch 231, American Embassy Taipei to Secretary of State, 22 Oct. 1953, “Overseas Chinese Celebrations of Chinese National Day,” Folder 360.01 Overseas Chinese, Box 18, Taiwan Embassy General Records, 1955–1964, RG 84, Archives II.

⁴⁴ Bert Fraleigh, “A Report on Observations of the Overseas Chinese Situation in Hong Kong, Thailand, Cambodia and South Vietnam,” 30 April 1956, Folder: Chinese Nationalist Propaganda Program, Box 20, Records of the Office of Chinese Affairs, 1954–56 (CA 1954–56), Records of the Department of State, RG 59, Archives II. The American Embassy in Taipei notes some inaccuracies in the Fraleigh report, particularly in his claims that there is not nearly enough propaganda reflecting the Free World side, but it did concur in his assertion that the Chinese Communists were making great inroads with their propaganda. See Foreign Service Despatch 601, American Embassy Taipei to Department of State, 24 April 1956, Folder: Overseas Chinese—extortion, remittances, attraction of capital, Box 10, CA 1954–56, RG 59, Archives II.

⁴⁵ “Overseas Chinese and US Policy,” 6 Sept. 1956, OBCF-28–091 China (#4) (9), Eisenhower Presidential Library; “A Regional Economic Plan for Free Asia to Counter Communist Penetration,” 9 April 1956, Folder: Overseas Chinese, Box 1, CA 1954–56, RG 59, Archives II; and “A Joint US-Free China Program to Organize Overseas Chinese Against Communism,” 9 April 1956, Folder: Overseas Chinese, Box 1, CA 1954–56, RG 59, Archives II.

Chinese communities and the ROC, and (to a lesser extent) soliciting voluntary contributions for both the information and military offensives against the mainland. Beyond promoting the development of Taiwan, such programs served to draw overseas Chinese funds and assets away from the PRC.

The sheer size of the Chinese population in Southeast Asia and the emergence of the region as a contested space in the Cold War battle for ideological superiority ensured that it would be at the heart of the overseas Chinese propaganda battle. But there was another Chinese population abroad that was equally strategic from the point of view of the competing PRC and ROC governments: the Chinese in the United States.

Chinese Americans and the Propaganda War

There were substantially fewer Chinese in the Americas than in Southeast Asia, but those who were in the United States combined economic power with potential access to an influential and important government. The overseas Chinese offices of both the ROC and the PRC kept an eye turned on this population, looking for ways to influence it. At the same time, the United States did not recognize this population as a true part of the Chinese diaspora, but it did see in it a means for promoting US goals among the Chinese in Southeast Asia.

The PRC had less direct access to Chinese in the United States than the ROC due to the lack of formal diplomatic ties, but that did not prevent it from exploring and exploiting the plight of Chinese in the US. The mainland Chinese office of overseas Chinese affairs published a lengthy report from a Chinese man in San Francisco in its *Overseas Chinese Bulletin* (*Qiao Xun*) publication in 1951. It described Chinese Americans as facing a unique dilemma, as US rhetoric of having a “special friendship” with China rarely extended to Chinese bound for the United States. American immigration laws and the harsh inspection system for new arrivals brewed frustration and bitterness, so Chinese born in the US (what he calls *Mei jì huaqiao*, or “American citizen overseas Chinese”) ended up far more approving

of the US government than immigrants. After all, “Every Chinese in America has experienced mistreatment by the American Imperialist Immigration Authorities.”⁴⁶ At the same time, he suggested that the combination of local discrimination and a strong system for Chinese language and cultural education meant that the majority of Chinese Americans—American citizens or not—still dearly loved their Chinese homeland. Politically, he explained that most were centrists—frustrated with the Kuomintang but wary of the communists. The Kuomintang partisans controlled the major Chinese organizations in San Francisco, and they had used this position to manipulate, abuse and blackmail the general Chinese population for years; to demonstrate his point, he referenced the problem of Nationalist organizations forcing Chinese Americans to make contributions to the war fund or buy ROC war bonds during the war against Japan.

He found that there were several ways for the residents of Chinatown to be uncommitted. There were those who despised the Kuomintang but were still uncertain that the communists would represent an improvement, and had personal reasons (holding war bonds or plans to retire on the mainland) that made them prefer to see the ROC retake China. Additionally, some American overseas Chinese opposed the Kuomintang but did not embrace the communists and were very susceptible to rumors; for this group, the most reliable source of information was family letters, so if these letters praised the PRC they would support it, and if they reviled the new government, they would oppose it. This group, the author noted, dominated the San Francisco Chinatown. Another subset of Chinese in the US despised the Kuomintang for its corruption, greed and mismanagement and felt that the best thing would be for the ROC to give way and let the new PRC attempt to govern. These individuals had no real confidence that the communists would do a better job, but they believed that they should have the chance to try. This group was not interested in whether or not the new government was communist, just that it was different from the old one. They too could be easily persuaded by family letters. Finally, there were those who embraced the new government and did not believe rumors about misrule or problems under the

⁴⁶ “Jiujinshan huaqiao qingkuang [The situation of overseas Chinese in San Francisco],” *Qiao Xun* [Overseas Chinese Bulletin] 45–6, 28 July 1951, Beijing, 365.

PRC. These people were not communists themselves, but they supported the government.⁴⁷

The author of the report expressed concern that prominent Kuomintang members were taking tours of American cities and drumming up support among the overseas Chinese—naturally by way of trickery and blackmail, but gaining influence all the same. He noted the establishment of the so-called “Overseas Chinese Anti-communist Association (*Huaqiao Fangong Zhonghui*),” which he claimed existed to extort money from Chinese Americans to prop up the Chiang Kai-shek government. This same government, he claimed, sent thugs into Chinatown on 1 October 1949, to prevent patriotic Chinese from celebrating the establishment of the PRC. He described how the Kuomintang reactionary forces shut down opposition newspapers like San Francisco’s *Chinese Western Daily News* (*Zhongxi Ribao* or *Chung Sai Yat Po*) but also how the average Chinese Americans preferred non-partisan schools and newspapers to the ROC-affiliated ones; in all, he painted a picture of a community very open to the right kinds of influence from China. Given US government restrictions on materials sent directly from the PRC, family letters would have to play a prominent role in winning the support of the Chinese in America.⁴⁸

The ROC did not have access to the families and friends of overseas Chinese who remained in Guangdong or Fujian Provinces, so it had to rely on more overt forms of information work. This is done in two directions, with efforts to engage the Chinese of the United States on the one hand, and to use that population to work on the rest of the overseas Chinese on the other. In 1952, the overseas Chinese affairs office of the ROC supported a broadcast by Chinese Americans directed at “Chinese all over the world.” Some of the issues the broadcast raised were rebuttals to PRC propaganda; for example, the broadcast celebrated the closing of the *Chinese Western Daily News*, which it claimed failed because Chinese Americans were not interested in communist ideas. It also heralded the efforts of the individuals who shut down the initial attempts to celebrate the founding of the PRC in Chinatown, remarking proudly that the Chinese communist flag has not flown since in San Francisco, and it commented on the

⁴⁷ “Jiujinshan Huaqiao Qingkuang [The Situation of Overseas Chinese in San Francisco],” 363–8.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

way the Chinese in each American city were uniting to form anti-communist organizations to support the ROC in its efforts to combat communist propaganda and retake the mainland.⁴⁹ In 1957, Chinese in the United States gathered at a mass meeting in Washington, DC convened by the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, during which the representatives from across the nation endorsed an anti-communist agenda.

Prominent Manila overseas Chinese Alphonso Z. Sy Cip became heavily involved with the ROC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) in promoting information work in the United States. He had traveled in the US in 1953 and was appalled by how many people he met in American Chinatowns who did not have a full understanding of the ROC government. In one letter, he offered a possible solution:

If they [Chinese in America] know more about Formosa and the Nationalist Government there, they themselves would do something toward making the American public realize and wake up to the importance of the Far East, particularly Formosa, in the preservation of peace and order not only in this sphere but for the whole Free World. We do not have as much funds [sic] as the British and other nationalities to spend on publicizing their cause in the US, but we could just as well reach our goal by utilizing our own nationals in the US and Hawaii to educate the American public in the importance of the Far East.⁵⁰

MOFA itself frequently reminded its consuls in the United States to make sure that Chinese Americans were fully aware of the progress in “Free China” so that they might throw the full weight of their support behind it. The OCAC also engaged in placing sympathetic, unattributed news articles in American Chinese newspapers (a strategy they, the PRC and the US used to great effect in Southeast Asia). It identified key sympathetic but not overtly KMT newspapers in New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Chicago and worked with the editorial staff to promote the government’s agenda.⁵¹

⁴⁹ “Meiguo Huaqiao de Fangong Yundong [American Overseas Chinese Anticommunist Activities],” *Qiaowu Yue Bao* [Overseas Chinese Affairs Monthly] 5, Nov. 1952, Taipei, 39–40.

⁵⁰ 706.2/0014, Alphonso Z. Sy Cip to George K.C. Yeh, 2 Feb. 1954, MOFA Taipei.

⁵¹ 707.6/0014, Gaijin Dui Mei Xuanchuan Gongzuo Jiantao Hui Jilu [Record of the Self-Criticism Meeting on Improving Propaganda Work Directed at the United States], 19 Feb. 1957, MOFA Taipei.

The US State Department officials charged with this work also considered how they might use America's own "overseas Chinese" population to its advantage, recognizing that doing so would be difficult. Years of Chinese exclusion, not to mention persistently harsh and suspicious examination of new immigrants in the post-exclusion years, had created a pool of resentment among the American Chinese. USIS could not legally spread propaganda towards its own citizens located within US borders, but it did manage to make use of friendly voices within its Chinese population in propaganda directed at Southeast Asia. One suggestion was to facilitate Chinese American radio broadcasts over the Voice of America—if the broadcasts were undertaken through some sort of "front" organization not easily attributable to USIS, then the message would not be propaganda from the US government, but a message from one group of overseas Chinese to another.⁵² One of the major USIS publications, *Free World Chinese* magazine, frequently printed news on the many successes of Americans of Asian descent. For example, it told the stories of a Chinese American Korean War veteran who was blinded in the war but opened a successful shop in San Francisco; the "Mother of the Year" for the United States in 1952, a Chinese woman who raised her eight children alone after her husband died; and a Chinese American police officer in New York attending night school to become a lawyer. In mid-1952, the magazine had a circulation of 43,000 across Southeast Asia, Hong Kong and Taiwan.⁵³

In 1952, the consulates in Singapore and Hong Kong were discussing the publication of a Chinese translation of the memoir *Fifth Chinese Daughter* by Chinese American writer Jade Snow Wong; in connection with the release of the book, they decided to fund a speaking tour by Ms. Wong throughout the major overseas Chinese areas of Southeast Asia. The idea was that she would encourage the overseas Chinese to support the United States and the free world, and at the

⁵² When it came to influencing the overseas Chinese of Southeast Asia, Chinese Americans suddenly became "overseas Chinese" in North America; the rest of the time, the US government tended to deny that they were a true part of the diaspora, but instead Americans who happened to be of Chinese descent. "Suggestions for increasing the effectiveness of our propaganda campaign," memorandum to F.E.P. Connors from C.A. Stuart, 5 Jan. 1951, Reel 24, Frames 574–5, RG 59, Archives II.

⁵³ *Free World Chinese* 1.8; 1.9; 4.2. Publications about the United States, *Free World Chinese*, Box 113, Records of the USIS, RG 306, Archives II.

same time, “the appearance of a Chinese American whose artistic achievements have been recognized by the American public would be a much-needed testimonial to the opportunities our society offers to citizens of so-called ‘minority races’.”⁵⁴ Wong’s itinerary for the trip included Tokyo, Hong Kong, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Bangkok and Rangoon. The consuls gave her tour mixed reviews; though they reacted differently to her personality, they shared the concern that the audience seemed to resent her success and thought her too assimilated into American culture for them to be proud of her as a Chinese woman. The Hong Kong consul noted that the population in Hong Kong thought of itself as “true” Chinese living across an arbitrary border, but the Chinese of America were “White Chinese.” In the context of the documents, it seems the consuls interpreted this as a racial claim—that the Chinese of America were too much like white people and had lost their culture. In fact, there may have been an element of politics involved as well. The leaders of the Chinese American communities were overwhelmingly supporters of Chiang Kai-shek. More than one Chinese author compared these Nationalists to the “White Russians” living abroad after the 1917 revolution, calling them the “White Chinese” to differentiate them from supporters of the communist government.⁵⁵

In spite of some misgivings about the success of the Wong tour, in mid-1954 the Hong Kong consulate was still anxious to continue to bring prominent Asian Americans over for speaking tours. As one report noted, “Although such grantees present some possible pitfalls—local Chinese for example are inclined to view with some disdain their more ‘foreignized’ Overseas brethren—they still are living refutation of hostile claims that Asians are maltreated in the United States.” The problem, naturally, was finding Asian Americans willing to suggest that their successes emerged out of the lack of anti-Asian discrimination in the United States, rather than in spite of it.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ “Leader Specialists Program: Jade Snow Wong,” Operations Memo to State from Hong Kong Consul General, 17 July 1952, Folder Visiting Persons, Box 3, USIS, Hong Kong, RG 84, Archives II.

⁵⁵ Foreign Service Despatch 1680, Hong Kong to State, 26 February 1953, Folder Visiting Persons, Box 3, USIS Consular Records, Hong Kong, RG 84, Archives II.

⁵⁶ Julian F. Harrington, “Semi-Annual Report on Educational Exchange Program,” Hong Kong to State, 21 July 1954, Folder Educational Exchange, Reports; Box 5, USIS General Records, Hong Kong Consulate, RG 84, Archives II.

Exchanges worked both ways; in addition to sending Chinese Americans to Asia on speaking tours, the US State Department brought Chinese to the United States for short-term grants. The problem was that sometimes these individuals still ran afoul of US immigration officials long suspicious of Chinese arrivals, and the results had the potential to do serious damage to US goals. USIS reported on one grantee with strong ties to the Nationalist government who returned “complain[ing] that he had been ‘hounded’ by immigration and naturalization officers and that he had been subjected to racial discrimination.” Reports suggested that far from becoming an advocate for the “Free World,” he and his family soon moved to communist China.⁵⁷ The US had adjusted its immigration laws to serve the foreign policy goals of the Cold War, but the lingering cases of prejudice continued to work against it.

Overseas Chinese Education

Education was such a cornerstone of Chinese family life at home and abroad that it became a vital element in the effort to win the support of the Chinese abroad. Overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia had long been accustomed to sending their children to Chinese schools. There were several reasons for this: discriminatory local policies that did not make local schools available to Chinese, cultural pride in being Chinese and community insularity that meant speaking and reading Chinese was a vital skill. Though Chinese primary and middle schools were prevalent throughout the region, there were no Chinese universities, and in some places only limited high schools.

Between 1949 and 1952 at least 12,000 overseas Chinese students returned to the mainland, and the PRC “made ‘systematic efforts’” to attract students from Southeast Asia to mainland schools and universities. These efforts included paid passage to the mainland, free education and the promise of good jobs upon graduation. As one American report noted, “Through the whole area, Communist activities in relation to schools, students and textbooks are the most dangerous activities

⁵⁷ Inspection Report of USIS Hong Kong, 6–9 June 1955, Archives II.

from [the] USIS point of view.”⁵⁸ The stated purpose of the PRC program was to recruit talent to help build up economic strength, but a number of Southeast Asian nations would become so concerned about the students being indoctrinated into communist revolutionary techniques and then sent back home that they passed measures preventing students from returning to Southeast Asia after graduation.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, in 1953 returnee numbers were at their highest level since the founding of the PRC, with an estimated 10,086 students returning to China in that calendar year alone. That year the PRC also reserved 7,000 (or 10 percent) of all admission slots to mainland universities for overseas Chinese students.⁶⁰

Part of the effort to win students to either side of the Cold War conflict included both recruiting students to either the mainland or Taiwan to complete their educations and supporting Chinese schools scattered throughout Southeast Asia. When visiting the Far East in 1953, Vice-President Richard Nixon became very concerned with the number of Chinese students “returning” to China for schooling, and he requested information from USIS and American Embassies in Southeast Asia about the problem. The US policy ultimately included provisions to work with the ROC to reverse this trend.⁶¹ In 1954, the US Consulate at Hong Kong proposed a full-fledged “Educational Program for Overseas Chinese.” The document noted that students were willing to go to the mainland because the communist recruiters in their home countries were well-organized, the PRC had a high level of prestige in some communities, they were assured of employment (notably, employment in the construction of a “New China”) after graduation and mainland education was free to overseas Chinese students. Free education was very likely the least influential of these four factors, in part because the students able to return also had families capable of paying their tuition. It concluded that the way to prevent

⁵⁸ Report on the Public Affairs Officers’ Meeting on Overseas Chinese, Hong Kong, 12 May 1954, Folder Overseas Chinese, Box 2, USIS, Hong Kong Consulate, RG 84, Archives II.

⁵⁹ Not all SEA countries took extraordinary measures to accomplish this; Indonesia, for example, had in place a legal provision divesting individuals of the right to re-entry once they had been out of the country for more than 16 months. J.F. Brewis to J.M. Addis, 18 Nov. 1953, FO File 371/105340, PRO.

⁶⁰ Memo, Donald V. Jacobson to Walter P. McConaughy, “The Chinese Communist Educational Program for Overseas Chinese,” 14 Dec. 1953, Reel 34, Frames 318–321, MF C0012, Archives II.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

the numbers of students returning from increasing was to make education in Taiwan a more attractive alternative.⁶² The first concrete action in support of this plan was to provide funds (in conjunction with the ROC government) to improve educational facilities in Taiwan, including building new dormitories and classrooms. By late 1955, discussions were underway to expand the program from targeting just college students to including some high school-level students who did not have access to non-communist facilities in their own countries.⁶³ University-level alternatives to mainland Chinese or Taiwanese schools for Chinese-educated students in Southeast Asia included Nanyang University, established in Singapore in 1956, and the University of the Philippines.

One way to prevent students from returning to the mainland was to publicize tales of horror from overseas Chinese students who returned to China for schooling then managed to “escape.” In one collection of such tales published by the ROC’s Overseas Press, a Chinese student from Thailand named Yi Tiepeng recalled how he “came out of hell.” Yi told of underground communist cells operating in Thailand that convinced thousands of Chinese students that their only hope for their futures would be “returning” to China for additional education. After arriving in China, Yi claimed he never had enough to eat, but that the OCAC officials did not listen to student complaints. He was sent to Guangzhou to attend the top overseas Chinese school and drilled with communist theory and praise for Stalin and Lenin. Yi claimed that one subject that received special attention was overseas Chinese remittances. He and his classmates were taught of the importance of remittances to New China and cajoled to write home and ask that their families increase their contributions. When they wrote home, he reported, the letters were only ever received by their families if the contents were full of praise for the PRC; if they complained of any ill-treatment or discomfort, the letters simply never arrived. The students eventually learned to ask classmates from Hong Kong to write letters on their behalf when they went home, asking their parents to write or cable urgent messages of family problems requiring the students to depart immediately for home. Cables, he noted, more often resulted

⁶² Foreign Service Despatch, Hong Kong to Department of State, 26 April 1954, Folder: Educational Exchange, Box 5, USIS HK 1951–55, RG 84, Archives II.

⁶³ “Education of Overseas Chinese Students in Taiwan,” 29 August 1956, Reel 41, Frames 567–571, MF C0012, Archives II.

in the students receiving exit permits. He also recalled students being beaten by cadres for demanding assistance, forced to undergo thought reform, sent into the army, starved to death, overworked and generally abused. It was, in other words, hell.⁶⁴

ROC publications contained such horror stories for overseas Chinese students from every possible background, and USIS publications printed their own tales as well. The US materials included propaganda tracts listing the reasons for choosing schools in Taiwan over China, and serialized autobiographical accounts like *Why I gave Up My BS at Beida*, by Chang Ch'ing, in periodicals like *World Today*. In addition, USIS commissioned an original full-length novel, Chung Yun's *Two Loves*, which was "built around the misadventures of four overseas students enrolled in a mainland university. Attracted to the mainland for various reasons, these students suffer the same disillusionment and one escapes to Hong Kong to tell his girlfriend that he should have listened to her when she attempted to dissuade him from going." Eileen Chang's novel *Farewell to the Korean Front* (later re-titled *Naked Earth*) was also used in this capacity.⁶⁵ Another highly valuable autobiography from a propaganda standpoint was a book by Indonesian Chinese student Soo Yu-Chen, who was first "duped" into attending school on the mainland, but later became the first overseas Chinese student to graduate from the National Taiwan University.⁶⁶

The students created propaganda openings for both sides, however. Even in the face of the student horror stories circulated by the US and the ROC, there were always students willing to return. For every tale of a student who had made his way "out of hell," there was another of a student who returned to discover a communist paradise. One unique opportunity that emerged for the PRC from the returning students was the presence of almost a thousand students with Hong Kong or Macanese citizenship in Guangzhou high schools, and another 650 in Guangzhou universities. All of them had family

⁶⁴ Yi Tiepeng, "Wo cong diyu li chu lai, [I came out of hell]," in *Zhonggong zenme duidai qiaosheng* [How the Chinese Communists treat overseas Chinese students] (Taipei: Haiwai Chuban She, 1956), 16–33.

⁶⁵ Foreign Service Despatch 33, Hong Kong to USIA, "USIA Materials for Overseas Chinese Students," 16 June 1954, Folder Overseas Chinese Education, Box 6, USIS Hong Kong 1951–55, RG 84, Archives II.

⁶⁶ Foreign Service Despatch 3, USIS Taipei to USIA, "Autobiographical novel by Soo Yu-Chen," 14 July 1954, Folder Overseas Chinese, Box 2, USIS Hong Kong 1951–55, RG 84, Archives II.

abroad, either in these territories or, more extraordinarily, in Taiwan under the rule of the Republic of China. Each winter break, the vast majority of these students applied to return home to see their families. Using these students to launch information and investigation work in “enemy” territory presented a unique opportunity, though it had to be done quietly so that the Hong Kong and Macau governments did not start preventing their return. If these students spread a positive image of China among their family members (and through letters to family and other contacts in Taiwan), they could fight against the misconceptions and lies spread by the ROC government. In some cases, even the willingness of the PRC to let them visit at all (and ideally, to do so by providing their train tickets and holding assemblies to “send them off”) would combat the international image of China as a closed state.⁶⁷

The other side of the student battle was the effort to win over Chinese schools across Southeast Asia. The philosophy behind such action was simple: children once convinced would grow up to become ardent supporters. Working through schools also provided access to overseas Chinese communities in those countries where either the ROC or the PRC did not have diplomatic relations established. The OCAC offices of both governments produced textbooks for use by overseas Chinese schools, and both ran teacher training programs. The US program called for cooperation with local governments and overseas Chinese to fight communist infiltration and to develop extra-curricular activities “conducive to non-communist orientation.”⁶⁸

Winning the Chinese Overseas, Losing the Host Governments

By 1954, the overseas Chinese had become a major strain in China’s relations with the nations of Southeast Asia, and the US began to

⁶⁷ 204/3/59–121, Zuzhi Guangzhou Shi gao deng xuexiao xuesheng hangjia fan Gang Ao qi jian jinxing xuanchuan he diaocha gongzuo de chubu zongdian [Initial points on the propaganda and investigation work directed at organizing Guangzhou City high school students in winter vacation returning to Hong Kong and Macau], 1955, Guangzhou.

⁶⁸ The proposal mentioned sports, crafts and music, but does not indicate which types of sports, etc. can be considered appropriately “non-Communist.” Memo, Norman J. Meiklejohn to James L. Meader, 25 Oct. 1955, “Overseas Chinese School Children,” Folder: Overseas Chinese Education, Box 6, USIS HK 1951–55, RG 84, Archives II.

notice resentment of its policies that singled out an ethnic minority for special treatment. Moreover, both countries faced the growing realization that it was not necessarily the elaborate propaganda campaigns that won over the loyalties of the population. Generally speaking, the attitude of the host government and how it treated the overseas Chinese was a far more decisive factor in propelling the politically uncommitted into the grasp of either the Nationalist or the communist government. As one American observer noted, "It is clear that the attitudes and loyalties of the OC will be greatly affected in the future, as in the past, by the treatment accorded them by the countries in which they live."⁶⁹ Recognizing this fact, many of the Southeast Asian governments began pursuing new policies to aid in Chinese assimilation and acculturation, treating their Chinese residents not as an extension of another country but as a component of their own.⁷⁰

At the Bandung Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference in 1955, the PRC indicated that it would be willing to consider giving up dual-nationality, a major gesture toward improved relations with the region. In a speech by Zhou Enlai, China suggested that it negotiate formal agreements which gave overseas Chinese the opportunity to choose which nationality they would prefer to keep. This way, the Chinese government would continue to protect those choosing to maintain their Chinese nationality, but it would be understood that they were giving up political rights in their place of abode.⁷¹ This method of ending dual-nationality was important: it demonstrated that the effort was undertaken for the sake of diplomatic gains. The discussions would start with the Indonesian government, but the PRC expressed willingness to consider the issue in other countries on a case-by-case basis.⁷² The offer was part of the

⁶⁹ Harold Hinton, "Communist China and the Overseas Chinese," report printed in IS-49-55, Intelligence Bulletins, Memos, and Summaries, Box 5, USIS, RG 306, Archives II.

⁷⁰ Such policies were pursued at different times by different governments; whereas Malaysia never implemented discriminatory policies directed only at the Chinese, China was helping to repatriate citizens from Indonesia who had been subjected to local abuses as late as 1966. C.P. Fitzgerald, *China and Southeast Asia Since 1945* (Hong Kong: Longman, 1973), 81–94.

⁷¹ The British Embassy in Jakarta noted that, "Except for vocal [Beijing] sympathizers, the Chinese population dislike the recent agreement on dual nationality," because they lost the flexibility of dual citizenship, the "best of both worlds." See O.C. Moreland to A.J. Gilchrist, 15 July 1955, FO File 371/115192, PRO.

⁷² F. Brewster, "Termination of Dual Nationality," 31 Jan. 1955, FO File 371/115191, PRO; Fitzgerald, *China and the Overseas Chinese*, 14–16. Note that China did not completely end dual nationality until 1980.

policy of “peaceful coexistence” between the PRC and its neighbors, and demonstrates the difficulties China experienced in reconciling its overseas Chinese policies and goals with its relations with Southeast Asia. After years of trying to influence overseas Chinese through political propaganda activities, “for the first time, China had relinquished her traditional claim that all persons of Chinese descent remain Chinese citizens even when they acquire another citizenship—the principle of ‘once a Chinese: always a Chinese’ which had aroused such fears of Chinese expansionism during the KMT period and had caused such resentment in Southeast Asia.”⁷³

British and American representatives in Southeast Asia had mixed feelings about the dual nationality treaty. By the mid-to-late 1950s, both governments appeared convinced that the best solution to ongoing conflicts with the Chinese minority in the region was assimilation and naturalization: to the extent that Straits Chinese considered themselves first and foremost Singaporeans or Malaysians, or Thai Chinese considered themselves Thai nationals, there would be a diminished desire to maintain close ties to communist China and work on its behalf. For British officials in Malaya and Singapore, however, the issue was a double-edged sword: in 1956, Zhou Enlai made a statement encouraging Chinese in these areas to become local citizens. But the statement was accompanied by a rumor that the PRC might be able to stop the ongoing communist insurgency in Malaya, which was led by ethnic Chinese, in exchange for recognition. The fear, then, was that China maintained a certain level of control over the overseas Chinese in the British territories, and therefore wanted those Chinese to naturalize so that they could better promote communism from within the country as citizens, rather than as aliens.⁷⁴

American officials observed the efforts of the newly-independent nations of Southeast Asia to encourage the overseas Chinese to seek naturalization and to assimilate with their own interests in mind. Malaysia and Singapore had large Chinese populations and could not consider them as separate from the rest of the population, but

⁷³ Victor Purcell, *Chinese in Southeast Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 486.

⁷⁴ Telegram from Singapore Consulate, 10 Oct. 1956, Folder 510.1, Box 2, Hong Kong Classified General Records, 1951–63, RG 84, Archives II; Foreign Service Despatch, 9 Oct. 1956, Folder 510.1, Box 2, Hong Kong Classified General Records, 1951–63, RG 84, Archives II.

countries like Thailand and Vietnam that had long had separate policies and laws for the Chinese worked to promote local language education, naturalized citizenship and intermarriage. From the perspective of these governments as well as the United States, if overseas Chinese naturalized and developed strong loyalties to their local governments, there would no longer be an ethnic minority capable of acting as a region-wide fifth column on behalf of China. By 1957, the Chinese residents of Southeast Asia appeared to have very limited usefulness as a positive force acting on behalf of the Free World, but they continued to be a potential boon to a communist Chinese government successful in exploiting them. Denying the PRC the support of the diaspora required the elimination of dual nationality and total integration at the local level. At the same time, some of the assimilation policies pursued by the Southeast Asian governments seemed too abrupt and drastic, and served only to “stiffen Chinese resistance to integration and engender resentments which [Beijing] could exploit.”⁷⁵ The forced naturalization of Chinese in Vietnam for the purpose of conscripting Chinese into the military created new resentments against the government. In the 1950s, at least, even those Chinese who had taken local citizenship in Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines still faced inequalities and did not have the same rights as the majority population.⁷⁶ Meanwhile, PRC propaganda claimed that the difficulties over dual nationality in the region were the creation of the Western colonial powers, and that the British and American governments used the citizenship issue to stir up difficulties between the nations of Southeast Asia and the PRC.⁷⁷

In response to the PRC move to end dual nationality, in October 1954 Chiang Kai-shek publicly expressed hope for the loyal support of the overseas Chinese in his efforts to regain China. Soon after Chiang’s speech, the Nationalist Ambassador to Canada, Liu Chieh, made a statement at the United Nations that overseas Chinese were not considered nationals of the Republic of China if they were citizens of another country. If true, this would have been revolutionary; in fact,

⁷⁵ Guidelines for United States Programs Affecting the Overseas Chinese, 17 Oct. 1957, Folder 570.2, Box 8, Records of the Office of Chinese Affairs, 1957, RG 59, Archives II.

⁷⁶ C.P. Fitzgerald, *China and Southeast Asia*, 92.

⁷⁷ Humphrey Tevelyan to Harold Macmillan, 13 May 1955, FO File 371/115192, PRO.

it appears that Liu was ahead of his government on this issue, as the ROC was not at all prepared to give up its rights to the diaspora.⁷⁸ Unlike the PRC, the ROC never attempted to end its claim to the overseas Chinese. It updated its nationality law in 1951 by reaffirming the dual nationality of overseas Chinese, so that Chinese living in nations that had recognized the PRC could acquire local citizenship and not be forced to register at PRC embassies or face statelessness. In taking on local citizenship, they would not lose Chinese citizenship; in fact, the ROC made no provision for the divestment of Chinese citizenship at all.⁷⁹

It is in this reluctance to give up the overseas Chinese as citizens that the greatest divergence in ROC and US overseas Chinese policy is found. Over the course of the 1950s and into the 1960s, the various branches of the US government poured an impressive amount of resources into the campaign to deny the overseas Chinese to the communists. No matter how much material they produced intended for this distinctively Chinese audience, the long-term goal was always the assimilation of the overseas Chinese into their host governments. Obviously, this policy was undermined by the fact that the short-term efforts worked in contradiction to long-term goals, and of course an American government that had not come to terms with its own minority population could hardly be successful implementing integration and assimilation in a foreign land. Even so, as the US Ambassador to the ROC would note in 1956, for the sake of the future stability of the region, the overseas Chinese needed local political rights and citizenship—a situation that would be good for the US, good for the overseas Chinese, but bad for the ROC.⁸⁰ The unique historical position of the Republic of China on Taiwan would ensure that they would always seek out the overseas Chinese as, first and foremost, Chinese nationals and citizens of their nation. If all of the overseas Chinese and refugees emerging out of China through Hong Kong were loyal to the ROC, then they would form two-thirds of the country's strength. In the 1950s especially, when the dream of returning to retake the mainland

⁷⁸ Nor would it, until the 1990s and the independence movement, which has moved to claim only "overseas Taiwanese" as its nationals. Purcell, *Chinese in Southeast Asia*, 483.

⁷⁹ George K.C. Yeh to Karl L. Rankin, 14 April 1955, File 426.6/0010, MOFA Taipei.

⁸⁰ Everett Drumright to Karl L. Rankin, 19 June 1956, Folder: Overseas Chinese, Box 1, CA 1954–56, RG 59, Archives II.

was still alive, this population was especially important because it was not assimilated.⁸¹

Ultimately, the overseas Chinese would not prove to be the “key to Southeast Asia” that all three governments had thought them to be in 1949. By 1957, a shift in the situation of the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia was apparent. The PRC was developing its policy of disengagement, and although many of the efforts designed to win overseas Chinese loyalties—including work in schools, propaganda, and economic incentives—would continue on some scale, the combination of internal campaigns and a desire to improve relations with the countries of Southeast Asia seeking to better incorporate their Chinese minorities into their national citizenry began to trump the importance of the diaspora. Overseas Chinese policy would no longer be part of its broader Cold War contest against the US and Chiang Kai-shek, but would be a part of its long-term relationships with its neighbors. Not only were the overseas Chinese not mobilized as a communist fifth column, but during the Cultural Revolution the far-left faction of the CCP dismantled the OCAC and purged its leadership for its years of failing to make revolution among the Chinese abroad (a policy which Zhou Enlai defended and which ultimately prevailed at the end of the turmoil).

US officials reached similar conclusions. Although some level of US efforts at bringing the overseas Chinese to the side of the Free World would continue, observers would start to reassess the importance of the overseas Chinese to Southeast Asia: the earlier theory that they held the “key” to the important region through economic power and political influence was not accurate, and policies had to change to reflect that. Additionally, the vast differences in circumstances between the countries of Southeast Asia would lead the information experts to seek a more nuanced, country-by-country approach, treating the overseas Chinese as a part of the domestic politics of the host countries. This indicated a fundamental shift of overseas Chinese policy, out of the realm of China policy and into the realm of US-Southeast Asian relations. Quite apart from the notion of a US foreign policy utterly at odds with that of the communist world, then, by the late 1950s the

⁸¹ A forceful discussion of these and other contrasts between American and ROC overseas Chinese policy can be found in “Lun Dangqian de Meiguo Huaqiao Zhengce [Discussion of Current US Overseas Chinese Policies],” *Weiqing Guobao* 128, 21 Nov. 1955, File 462.6/0009, MOFA Taipei.

United States and the PRC were working along similar lines toward essentially the same goals for the Chinese of Southeast Asia, both in opposition to the efforts of the ROC.

For the ROC, by contrast, the issue of overseas Chinese support would remain an important issue in their quest for government legitimacy. Though the ROC would need to try to find a way to improve its relations with its nationals abroad without sacrificing its often precarious relations with the host nations in the process, its position in 1957 was closer to that of the CCP as a revolutionary party than its own history as a Chinese government. For the time being, it could discount the larger diplomatic issues in the name of gaining the vital base of support.

Although it emerged steeped in Cold War rhetoric, the contest for the loyalties of the overseas Chinese during the 1950s better demonstrates just how problematic the bipolar construction of the conflict can be in Asia. From the simple idea of containing versus spreading communism emerged a far more complicated project of finding a home for ethnic Chinese minorities that would no longer require them to take any side in the conflict other than their own.