

The Nationalists' Regional Relations in the Early Cold War, 1949-1955

Steven Phillips

Towson University

*Draft, not for citation*

## **Introduction**

My first book, *Between Assimilation and Independence: The Taiwanese Confront Nationalist China, 1945-1950*, examined the troubled relationship between Taiwanese, those of Chinese descent on the island prior to 1945, and the Nationalist government. I highlighted how the relationship between state and society was established in the five years after the War of Resistance. The fundamental character of that relationship would not change until the 1970s. Nationalist misrule, magnified by different political cultures on each side of the Taiwan Strait, led to a series of conflicts. Ultimately, however, the Nationalists, even as they collapsed on the mainland, were able to implement authoritarian rule on the island. On Taiwan the Nationalists combined a police state, limited political participation, and economic incentives to create a relatively compliant population. This enabled Chiang and his followers to build the stable government and prosperous economy that they had failed to do on the mainland.

Now, I wish to look at the development of the Nationalists' foreign policy during the early Cold War. I believe that Chiang and his supporters sought to make Taiwan into a regional center for anti-communism. Three questions shape this research. First, why did the Nationalists take this approach? Second, how did they seek to achieve this goal? Third, what were the major barriers to international anti-communist coalition building during the early Cold War? I examine these questions through four inter-related strategies (state to state diplomacy, military cooperation, united front work, and Overseas Chinese mobilization). This is not simply the story of problems that are identified, policies that are devised and implemented, and results that are evaluated. Instead, I look at the early Cold War in the context of a series of difficult compromises the Nationalists made and the contradictions they confronted while pursuing these four strategies. This project not only helps us understand the

Cold War in Asia during the early and mid 1950s, it sheds light on larger, long-term, issues related to multilateralism in the region. This very brief paper offers an overview of my recent research and some very tentative conclusions.

The title of this short paper defines the scope of this project. First, I use the term “Nationalists” because my research focuses on how the Nationalist Party and the Republic of China (ROC) attempted to maintain international influence and domestic legitimacy after a crushing defeat on the mainland. While the importance of the state, the ROC, in international relations is obvious, I believe English language scholarship has not given the Nationalist Party sufficient attention. Chiang’s dominance of the Nationalists’ foreign policy during the period of his temporary resignation from the presidency in 1949 illustrates the party’s importance. Simply put, China’s military leaders and ministry heads were more responsive to Chiang through the party than they were to Acting President Li Tsung-jen. The minutes of the Standing Committee of the Nationalist Party Central Committee during the 1950s reveals that this body initiated many policies, and certainly approved any significant initiatives. In the Standing Committee, Chiang would often request that members organize a small committee on a topic of interest to him. The committee would then report back with recommendations. Those recommendations were approved, then passed along to the government bureaucracy, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for implementation.

Important policies such as Overseas Chinese mobilization were led by the Nationalist Party, not the state. The same was true for united front (統一戰線) efforts. The state would be required to supply funding and support, but did not initiate these endeavors. Examining the relationship between party and state illustrates how the Nationalists could match the much larger People’s Republic’s united front work through a plethora of organizations led by a small number of mainland-born stalwarts. While Chiang and his son played key roles in setting overall policies, much of the daily work of building ties to East and Southeast Asia

fell to Ku Cheng-kang (谷正綱) and Cheng Yen-fen (鄭彥棻). To date, English-language scholarship has offered little concerning the latter two men. Ku was a member of the Nationalist Party's Central Executive Committee and of the National Assembly. He was a chairman of the Taiwan branch of the Asian Peoples Anti-Communist League (APACL, 亞洲人民反共聯盟), and chairman of APACL on several occasions. He later became chairman of the World Anti-Communist League and head of its China chapter. Cheng became the most important leader in Overseas Chinese affairs after the move to Taiwan. In 1950, he joined the Central Reform Committee (改造委員會), and became head of the Committee's Third Section (第三組), which managed overseas affairs. He also headed the Overseas Bureau of the Nationalist Party, thus combining party and government activities under a single individual.

Second, and related to the point above, I use the term “relations” rather than diplomacy, because this research is about more than traditional state to state diplomacy carried out through foreign ministries. It includes working through Overseas Chinese, and a subset of Overseas Chinese who joined the Nationalist Party. It also involves international united front groups devoted to an anti-communist internationalism, almost a mirror image of what the Nationalists thought the Soviets were achieving around the world. Further, Nationalist attempts to influence newly-decolonized states that chose to recognize the Beijing government usually took place outside of normal diplomatic channels.

Third, I focus on the 1949 to 1955 period because that was when the key relationships, problems, and organizations were formed that would last until Nixon's rapprochement with the mainland in the early 1970s. In 1949, the Nationalists retreated to Taiwan, which became the final redoubt for up to two million soldiers, bureaucrats, businessmen, and their families (in addition to 6 million Taiwanese). While Chiang Kai-shek consolidated control over Taiwan, his international position collapsed. The Truman Administration valued the

possibility of relations with Mao Zedong's regime, or at least a weak Sino-Soviet alliance, more highly than the survival of the ROC. The United States opted to stand back and allow the Communist-Nationalist struggle to conclude with the expected collapse of the island garrison and its absorption by the new People's Republic. Most American allies and newly decolonized nations did not expect Chiang's government to survive. At this low point in Nationalist fortunes, Chiang sought desperately to build ties to potential allies in East and Southeast Asia, starting with South Korea, Japan, and the Philippines. Even after the Korean War caused the United States once again to recognize and to aid the Nationalists, Chiang and his supporters did not abandon their regional initiatives.

For several reasons, the mid-1950s offers a logical end-point for this effort.<sup>1</sup> By March 3, 1955, the last of the US security treaties, the US-ROC Mutual Defense Treaty, went into effect. By this time, it was clear that there would be no multilateral or regional defense arrangement including the Republic of China. Also, although most important Japan's post-war leader, Yoshida Shigeru, had left the scene in December 1954, he had set the pattern for Japan's relations with the region, and the limits on Japan's re-armament. In 1955 the Liberal Democratic Party was established in Japan. It would carry on Yoshida's policies for decades. By 1955, the Asian People's Anti-Communist League had been established and the pattern for Overseas Chinese work had been set. Finally the Bandung Conference of April 1955 confirmed that Taiwan's position would be outside of the non-aligned movement. That year also marked a high-point for Beijing's regional diplomacy as defined by the term "peaceful coexistence". Finally, recognition of the ROC was solidified when the Republic of Vietnam under Ngo Dinh Diem established diplomatic relations in December 1955.

Finally, the concept of "regional" requires some elaboration. Joseph Nye defined an international region as "a limited number of states linked by a geographical relationship and

---

<sup>1</sup> 1955 is also the chronological framework used by Robert Accinelli in *Crisis and Commitment: United States Policy toward Taiwan, 1950-1955*. University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

by a degree of mutual interdependence". "Regionalism" was the effort to form associations on the basis of regions. I believe the Nationalists were engaged in a struggle to build a "regional" consciousness in both East and Southeast Asia. Their "regionalism" constantly conflicted or competed with strong feelings of nationalism, particularly in newly-independent nation-states. In other cases, Taiwan's geographic position made it difficult for the Nationalists to justify their inclusion—such as in Southeast Asia. In general, the Nationalists defined Southeast Asia as stretching from the Philippines to Burma, without Australia. East Asia was Japan, Korea, and Taiwan/China. Nationalist documents suggest they hoped to unite the regions based on Taiwan's geographic location between Southeast and East Asia. In other cases, Nationalists would use "Asia" to define the scope of their efforts. This was often part of the rhetoric of Pan-Asianism that came from Sun Yat-sen. However, in terms of policy, this Asia usually went no further west than Pakistan, and almost always meant East and Southeast Asia. While diplomats occasionally used the conception of "Asia-Pacific", little attention was paid to island south and east of the Philippines.

Thus far I have allowed the Nationalists to shape the scope of my research. Among Nationalist leaders, there existed a variety of mental maps of the ROC's security needs and key international relationships. Different aspects of the Nationalists' foreign relations, each with different geographic foci, were managed by often competing bureaucracies. For example, some policies and initiatives, such as those focused on Overseas Chinese or anti-communist organizations, included all of East and Southeast Asia, including states that did not recognize the ROC. Diplomatic efforts were generally carried out on a bilateral basis, and obviously focused on those states that still recognized the government in Taipei. For the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the three most important regional bilateral relationships were with Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines. In between these two extremes were struggles to build a military alliance—what the Nationalists deemed a "Far Eastern NATO". This focused on the

South Korea, the Philippines, and a shifting group of Southeast Asia nations. Part of my research will examine how top leaders Taipei sought to reconcile and coordinate these regional mental maps. For example, Chiang's interest in the Philippines grew in part from his belief that this nation could serve as one avenue to increase influence in Southeast Asia. One of the primary barriers to Nationalist success may have been that the regime tried to link together too many disparate peoples and nations.

### **Archives and Historiography**

The Chinese-language archival material necessary to research this topic is now available. Over the past decade, the Academia Historica (國史館), Taiwan's national archives, has made available correspondence between Chiang and his top civilian and military advisors. These documents include reports from South Korea, the Philippines, and Japan detailing talks with the leaders of these countries. The diplomatic files also contain information on how the state sought to organize Overseas Chinese and Nationalist Party cells overseas, as well as how the Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported multi-national semi-official organizations such as the Asian Peoples Anti-Communist League. There also exists a large number of autobiographical works by prominent Nationalists. The Nationalist Party archives have been invaluable. These include materials on Overseas Chinese work through the Overseas Bureau and the minutes of the meetings of the party's 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Central Committee Standing Committee (第六屆, 第七屆中常會) and the Central Reform Committee. Finally, the Academia Sinica's Modern History Institute library and archives contain files from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Of particular value are items from the Asia-Pacific Bureau (亞太司) and the Secretariat (秘書處). The former is one of the most complete sources of information on bilateral relations. The Secretariat files have some of the best collections of documents and records of conversations related to Sino-American

discussions of Taipei's regional policies. These items, coupled with materials from the United States National Archives, Harvard's East Asian Library, and the Hoover Institution, offer insight into the Nationalists' hopes for regional anti-communist cooperation.

Recent books or articles by scholars on Taiwan have influenced my work. For example, Assistant Professor Lin Kuo-hsien at Chengchi University is doing great work on how the Nationalists' Cold War propaganda impacted domestic politics and Taiwanese world-views. My research looks at what the Nationalist government and Party wanted, or how the regime wished to be perceived at home and abroad, rather than attempting to prove that those on the island were changed by these efforts. However, Lin offers insight into how the regime organized and spread propaganda, and selected the major themes for propaganda. Professor Liu Wei-kai, also at Chengchi University, is one of the premier scholars of Chiang Kai-shek. For example, his book on the Nationalist retreat to Taiwan in 1949, and his article on Chiang's reaction to the Korean War, provide valuable detail on the Generalissimo's policies and a roadmap for research in Taiwan's archives.

Huang Kwei-bo's work on China and Taiwan in Southeast Asia offers me some frameworks to consider. I hope my work can connect to some of his writings on conflict resolution in Southeast Asia. He pointed out some of the constraints on the ability of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to coordinate their China policy, raising issues that also existed in the 1950. In 2000, he raised factors that limited unity, including the diversity of military power and socioeconomic development, domestic political conflicts, differences in perceptions of external threats.<sup>2</sup> Yeh-chung Lu and Hongying Wang have compared soft power efforts on both sides of the Straits, noting that "Taiwan's interest in soft

---

<sup>2</sup> Huang Kwei-bo, "The Association of South East Asian Nations' Confidence and Security Building with the People's Republic of China: Internal Constraints and Policy Implications," *Maryland Series in Contemporary Asian Studies* 6 (2000).

power is closely linked to its calculations of cross-Strait relations.”<sup>3</sup> Their discussion of soft power includes many elements that were present in the 1950s. Perhaps the most important difference is that the Cold War focus on Taiwan as model of anti-communism has become today’s emphasis on the island’s democratization.

Mainland scholarship also shapes my research. Recent studies of the 1950s from the People’s Republic, including work done at the Cold War history center at East China Normal University, highlight the new archival materials available to scholars. These works also offer ways to compare Beijing and Taipei. For example, the policies related to Overseas Chinese mobilization promoted by these Cold War antagonists appear to be more alike than different. Both confronted nationalism in post-colonial Southeast Asia that often manifested itself as anti-Chinese sentiment. My research to date suggests that understanding Communist policies are vital because the Nationalists closely monitored and often reacted to Beijing’s initiatives. For example, materials in the Nationalist Party archives from the Sixth Section (第六組), which was charged with intelligence gathering, highlight the party’s intense interest in Communist success in the region.

Most English-language scholarship on the Republic of China during the Cold War has focused on ties between Taipei and Washington. Certainly, through works by scholars such as Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, the story of bilateral relations across the Pacific Ocean has been well-documented. I am interested in trying to look outward from Taipei at the region, and showing how the Nationalists sought to build the Republic’s status as an Asian power rather than simply as an agent for America’s Cold War containment policy. Recent books, such as Michael Szonyi’s *Cold War Island: Quemoy on the Frontline*, show that at least some English-language scholarship is moving away from its past focus on Washington.

### **Nationalist Motives for a Regional Approach**

---

<sup>3</sup> Hongying Wang and Yeh-chung Lu, “The Conceptions of Soft Power and Its Policy Implications: A Comparative Study of China and Taiwan,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 17:56 (2008), 437.

Within the context of Chiang's overall goal of making Taiwan into a regional hub of anti-communist activity, a complicated mix of factors influenced the Nationalists' policies. First and foremost, the Nationalists sought to build relationships that did not rely upon Washington. Here, my research fits with recent scholarship on the Cold War, which is now showing much more interest in conflict within blocs rather than between them. My conception of Taipei-Washington relations is shaped by what is sometimes called "post-revisionism" in the history of American foreign relations. This approach avoids grand theories of empire, such as dependency theory, and focuses on how elites in client states and in great powers sought to shape their relationship—sometimes in the context of an "empire by invitation". Each wanted to obtain the greatest possible commitment from the other while maximizing flexibility.

The Flying Tigers, the wartime alliance against Japan, renewed United States support after the Korean War began, the Military Assistance Advisory Group, and the Mutual Defense Treaty of 1955 helped create the Cold War narrative of Sino-American amity and cooperation. There is another narrative, however, vital for understanding Nationalist policies in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Profound disappointment, anger, and a sense of betrayal shaped the views of Chiang and many of his top lieutenants. The belated removal of the Unequal Treaties, lukewarm support during the first four years of the War of Resistance, the Stilwell imbroglio, Marshall's failed mission, lack of aid in the late 1940s, and the infamous White Paper of August 1949 offered evidence of Washington's unreliability.

Further, until the 1960s, there existed within the Nationalist ranks a large number of military men who had been educated in Japan or at the Whampoa (Huangpu) or Baoding military academies. These leaders, who came of age during the high-tide of the Nationalists' anti-imperialist rhetoric of the 1920s, tended to remain deeply suspicious of American motives. Many were personally more comfortable working with Japanese anti-communists

than with Americans. They had been embroiled in factional disputes with leaders who enjoyed Washington's backing. As shown by the removal of General Sun Li-jen and the 1957 Liu Ziran Incident, the Cold War obscured, but certainly did not eliminate, deep-seated antagonism between the Nationalists and the Americans. The humiliating defeat and retreat to the island, and the suspicion of the United States and its reliability, should form one chapter of my future monograph.

Regional efforts were also designed to preserve Taipei's international position, to build anti-communist sentiment, and to strengthen morale on the island itself. Obviously, the competition with the new Peoples' Republic for diplomatic recognition was a key aspect of Nationalist initiatives. Long-held beliefs among some in the Nationalist ranks that the party needed to maintain its anti-imperialist heritage and fulfill the dreams of pan-Asianism advocated by Sun Yat-sen shaped initiatives toward East and Southeast Asia. The Nationalists also envisioned Overseas Chinese as "mothers of the revolution", a vital source of financial support and domestic legitimacy. Finally, Nationalist policies were driven by perceptions of Beijing's success in the region, particularly in the wake of the Bandung Conference of 1955. Taipei sought to mimic and to undermine Communist efforts during the 1950s, as Chiang and Mao competed for international influence and recognition. My preliminary research suggests that the two Cold War antagonists were more alike than different in many of their tactics. In fact, one valuable framework for the Nationalists' public diplomacy and propaganda was the united front—an approach that both parties utilized since the 1920s. To date, however, scholarship on the united front has focused on the Chinese Communists during the War of Resistance and civil war. My research will show yet another similarity between the Nationalists and Communists.

## **Diplomacy**

To achieve these regional goals, the Nationalists pursued four strategies. After the

introduction and one chapter explaining the collapse on the mainland, the retreat to Taiwan, and resulting antipathy toward the Americans, I want each of these to form one chapter of a monograph.

First was traditional diplomacy through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Starting in 1949, the Nationalists engaged in frantic diplomacy over recognition for two reasons: First, the regime was in collapse and few expected it to survive. Second, the rush of decolonization in South and Southeast Asia meant that many new states were making a choice of which China to support. Here, Ministry of Foreign Affairs records from the Academia Historica and the Modern History Institute archives are vital. Chiang's orders were simple: present the retreat to Taiwan in the best possible light and prevent recognition of the new government in Beijing. Chiang's diplomats found themselves caught in a dilemma: They needed American support and aid in order to survive and to convince some nations to continue to recognize the ROC. At the same time, the Nationalists needed to highlight their independence and anti-imperialist credentials in order to woo other nations, such as India. The "loss" of India, which recognized the People's Republic in April 1950, was a particularly bitter blow, as Chiang has visited India during the War of Resistance and felt his strong anti-British stance would guarantee good relations with India's new leaders. This only increased pressure on the Ministry to monitor the ROC's relationships, and to prevent further losses.

While the competition for recognition between Mao and Chiang was relatively straight-forward (and easy to measure), there exists another aspect of Nationalist diplomacy worthy of attention. The Nationalists were frustrated that even countries that never severed diplomatic ties to the ROC hesitated to exchange ambassadors or move their embassies to Guangdong, then Taiwan. For example, Syngman Rhee appeared to delay accepting Shao Yulin as ROC ambassador in 1950. There exist a large collection of telegrams from Manila, Seoul, and elsewhere in the region discussing how to remove ambiguity in these countries'

relations with the ROC. Here, the Nationalists wanted regional allies to break with America's policy toward the regime, but had limited success. I believe that the Truman Administration constantly undermined the Nationalists' regional diplomacy through bilateral relationships that offered American aid and support, and thus reduced the need to make common cause with Chiang. Even after the start of the Korean War appeared to guarantee the Nationalists' survival, many non-communist or anti-communist countries refused to fully embrace ties with Taipei. The ROC's inability to participate in the San Francisco Peace Treaty heightened concerns. Nationalists worried the Peace Treaty created a formula to exclude them from future agreements, and would weaken their regional influence.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' struggle to maintain state to state relations was never easy. Nationalist diplomacy during the early Cold War exposed how the government and party functioned, and how Chiang sought to maintain his dominance of the policy-making process. The Ministry often had to confront the contradictions in the Nationalists' regional policies. The Ministry received constant pressure in the Standing Committee to provide more assistance to Overseas Chinese, overseas party cells, and united front efforts, even as diplomats suggested these activities made "regular" diplomatic relations and recognition issues more complex. In general, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was staffed with those most favorable to and familiar with the United States, while Overseas Chinese and party work was dominated by Nationalists with very different backgrounds. Based on my review of the reports sent to Chiang, it appears that it usually fell to the Ministry to bring bad news to the Generalissimo. For example, in early 1950 and in 1955, the Minister of Foreign Affairs had to report to Chiang on the failures to forge a regional military alliance. The Ministry's work was hampered by Chiang's tendency to use trusted subordinates to handle some of his most delicate assignments, often by-passing the diplomats completely. For example, ROC policy toward Japan from 1945 to 1952 was dominated by a group of generals who had been

educated in Japan in the 1910s and 1920s. As mentioned earlier, the Generalissimo often requested that the Standing Committee form small "guidance" committees to examine issues like international propaganda or Overseas Chinese policies. The Ministry had limited input into these efforts. In short, the story of regional diplomacy in the early Cold War is complicated by the fact that the Nationalists were not only competing against the Communists, they were also competing against each other.

Nationalist diplomacy and Chiang's regional initiative also became caught up in partisan politics. For example, every success that Chiang appeared to enjoy in building cooperation with Philippine President Elpidio Quirino came at a price. Sino-Philippine relations became part of heated, and occasionally violent, conflict between the Liberal and the Nationalist parties. Chiang pinned his hopes for strong relations with the Philippines and for a regional military alliance on Quirino, who became president in 1948 after the death of Manuel Roxas. Quirino won the 1949 election, which was portrayed as one of the most fraudulent in the country's history. Messages to Chiang from Nationalist diplomats in Manila made clear that Philippine foreign policy was often driven by conflict between the parties, and that Quirino's support for strong ties to the ROC guaranteed that others would oppose them. For example, Foreign Minister Carlos Romulo, who served as President of the United Nations General Assembly in 1949 and 1950, did not fully support Quirino's anti-communist policies. In fact, he was blamed for undermining the Quirino/Chiang/Rhee plan for an anti-communist summit in 1950 by personally inviting India and other countries that did not recognize the ROC to attend. Romulo would switch parties in 1953. Quirino would lose the 1953 presidential contest to Nationalist Ramon Magsaysay. While both Quirino and Magsaysay were strongly anti-communist, the latter leader was more distant from Chiang. Similar examples can be found in South Korea, Japan, Thailand, and elsewhere.

### **Military Cooperation**

The second facet of the Nationalists' regional strategy centered on the quest for a formal anti-communist military alliance (反共軍事聯盟), a Far Eastern North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), that would grow from cooperation between the ROC, South Korea, and the Philippines. The Nationalists' initiative reflected disappointment with the lack of American support, perceptions of tangible security threats from Communist regimes or movements, and an idealization of the progress made toward Western European anti-communist unity. Chiang's agenda became most clear during his July and August 1949 visits to the Philippines and South Korea. Each visit concluded with a public statement promising a future meeting to organize an alliance. The Academia Historica holds correspondence between Chiang and his top civilian and military advisors planning for these visits. These materials also include reports and records of conversations from South Korea, the Philippines, and Japan detailing talks with the leaders of these countries. These documents, coupled with materials from the United States National Archives, offer insight into the Nationalists' hopes for regional military cooperation. In the early summer of 1949, Chiang and Syngman Rhee agreed to push Philippine President Elpidio Quirino to lead this effort based on the assumption that he had the best relationship with Washington. Nationalist documents also detail a concerted effort to appeal to Quirino's vanity by asking him to lead a bloc of East and Southeast Asian nations. The Nationalists also assumed that the Philippine leader would encourage the United States to join any multilateral alliance. Chiang even hoped to include Thailand, Australia, and others in this arrangement.

Some Nationalist documents suggested that a regional military organization could be used to reintegrate Japan into the region. In fact, through the 1949-1952 period Chiang worked hard for a post-war settlement that would allow Japan to rearm and to assist in a regional anti-communist movement. Many of Chiang's subordinates in the Military Representative Office in Tokyo felt that Japan was a more steadfast force against

communism than the United States. In fact, I think I can make a strong case that the Generalissimo was eager to see Japan re-armed as a hedge against the United States reducing its commitment to the region. He worked with Japanese anti-communists, many of whom had been involved in the invasion of China (such as General Okamura Yasuji). Starting with the defense of Jinmen in 1949, Chiang hired the so-called White Group of retired Japanese officers to offer military training and advice. This cooperation soon went far beyond military advisors--something the Americans strongly opposed but could not prevent. It included discussions of regional security and how to shift Japanese public opinion to favor rearming and to oppose trade with the mainland. Sino-Japanese discussions of cooperation evoked a model of pan-Asianism that fit with both Sun Yat-sen and Japan's own wartime propaganda. Retired Japanese officers and Nationalist generals lamented the Americans' lack of understanding of Asia's people, culture, and politics. Each side suggested that together they had a special responsibility to the people of East Asia to remove outside influence—here defined as Soviet Communism. To date, English-language scholarship has not detailed these interactions, or the alternative model of an anti-communist struggle they describe. After the peace treaty between the ROC and Japan went into effect, Nationalist efforts to change Japan's military policy tapered off, but never completely stopped. Despite strong American objections, the use of Japanese advisors continued through the 1960s.

The Nationalists sought to facilitate Japan's return to the regional prominence. For example, I have also found documents concerning Nationalist work to promote reconciliation between Seoul and Tokyo. Chiang's subordinates in Seoul sometimes struggled to explain to Taipei the depth of the hatred toward the Japanese in Korea, how those feelings could override anti-communist solidarity, and how the entire issue was embroiled in rivalries with North Korea and within political factions in South Korea. Chiang received encouragement for his efforts from one American whose anti-communist credentials he felt were unassailable.

Chiang's representatives in Tokyo kept General Douglas MacArthur informed of work on behalf of a multilateral military alliance, and cooperation with some Japanese. MacArthur and his staff seemed to have been enthusiastic supporters of regional anti-communist cooperation at least one year before the start of the Korean War. The General was seen as a figure capable of uniting Japanese, Koreans, Chinese, Filipinos, and Americans. The evidence suggests that Washington was not fully aware of the discussions between MacArthur (or his staff), Chiang's representatives, and retired Japanese military officers. MacArthur was the one United States leader that pro-Japanese Nationalists such as Tsao Shih-cheng (head of the ROC's Military Representative Office in Tokyo) and Ho Ying-ch'in eagerly sought out. Until Truman recalled the General in 1951, Chiang and MacArthur mutually encouraged each other to promote regional solidarity against communism, including the expanded use of Japanese resources.

Regional military cooperation highlighted the depths of distrust between Chiang and the Americans in Washington, as the Truman Administration worked actively to block the Nationalist initiative. Quirino and Syngman Rhee were both informed that there was little hope of success. Americans saw Quirino's actions as a cynical ploy to spur the United States to offer more bilateral aid to Manila. Quirino's visit to the United States in late 1949 gave the Americans an opportunity to further undermine Chiang's plans. In fact, the Philippine President did not press the issue in Washington during his trip there immediately after the Baguio conference. Upon his return from Washington, he announced that he wished to hold a regional meeting devoted to non-military matters that included members of the nascent non-aligned movement in the spring of 1950. The Nationalists and the South Koreans did not participate in this conference, which accomplished little. The American released the infamous White Paper on the eve of Chiang's August trip to Chinhae to meet with Rhee to discuss the alliance. Both the contents and timing of the White Paper dismayed the Nationalists.

Nationalist documents blame the White Paper for reducing South Korean interest in military cooperation. Beyond the lack of American support seen in talks with the Philippine and South Korean leaders, documents from the Australian National Archives show that the Americans dampened Canberra's interest in a regional pact in 1949 and 1950. Only in 1951, when Australia and New Zealand objected to the terms of the draft peace treaty with Japan, did the Americans come to support a multilateral arrangement—without the ROC.

The failure to create a Far Eastern NATO highlighted some barriers to international cooperation in the region. First, unlike NATO, the three core nations of the potential alliance—the ROC, South Korea, and the Philippines—each faced a different Communist threat—from the People's Republic, North Korea, and the rural guerrilla movement called the Huks. There existed no single, overwhelming threat to bring unity, such as the possibility of a massive Soviet attack into Western Europe that motivated NATO. In fact, the core idea of NATO—that an attack on one member is an attack against them all—is precisely what limited its appeal in East Asia and the Pacific and repelled the Americans. Second, the Nationalists' defeat on the mainland and the resulting questions over their legitimacy and Taiwan's status made participation in international forums contentious. The Nationalists were trapped: they could not credibly compete with the PRC for a place in the non-aligned movement, nor could they be completely embraced by the United States in a multilateral framework. The controversy over the legitimacy of the ROC on Taiwan was great enough that even other anti-communist regimes found it difficult to work with Chiang.

Third, America's overwhelming economic, diplomatic, and military power undercut most attempts at regional military cooperation. In this context, the Truman and Eisenhower administrations built a series of bilateral or multilateral military alliances on Washington's terms and timeline. Quirino signed his treaty with the United States in August 1951. Rhee lost interest discussing a regional treaty as he entered into negotiations for the defense pact

with the United States, which was signed in October 1953. Taiwan was never seriously considered for the two multilateral pacts in the region, Australia-New Zealand-United States Treaty (ANZUS, April 1952) and the weak Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO, February 1955). The implementation of the United States-ROC treaty in March 1955 brought an end to serious efforts in this area. Although Chiang made several other attempts to create a broad alliance through the 1960s, each foray brought about less notice than the previous one.

While the establishment of the Military Assistance Advisory Group and the Mutual Security Treaty proved vital for the defense of the ROC, it is important to remember that Chiang and his supporters had hoped to protect the island through a multilateral framework that included the United States. In this sense, the bilateral arrangements with Washington represented less a triumph for Nationalist diplomacy than a consolation prize. The United States and other anti-communist states in East and Southeast Asia lacked the regional solidarity, domestic political support, cultural affinity, historical ties, and immediate unified threat necessary to forge their own NATO. As Realists would argue, Washington hoped to maximize its flexibility and could prevent any single local conflict from embroiling the region. Of course, as the idea of the Domino Theory became au currant, the United States found itself unable to easily reduce its commitment to any one partner without creating the perception of wavering support for all its allies.

### **United Front Work**

The third strand of the Nationalists' regional strategy were efforts to foster semi-official organizations such as the Asian Peoples' Anti-Communist League (APACL). Made up of representatives from countries in South, Southeast and East Asia, APACL formed part of Chiang's attempt to build legitimacy domestically and support internationally. In fact, APACL, like youth groups and organizations of Overseas Chinese, linked local politics and regional diplomacy. On Taiwan, the Nationalists used APACL to shape the ideology of

Taiwanese, Chinese immigrants who arrived before 1945, and to boost the morale of recent mainland refugees. The regime was obsessed with projecting an image of the impending collapse of the People's Republic and of the Nationalists' liberation of China, perhaps to convince its staunchest supporters as much as its fiercest critics. The League served the diplomatic and international propaganda needs of the regime. For example, Chinese participants constantly urged other delegates from other nations to strengthen diplomatic ties with Chiang's government. The League also highlighted the Nationalists' response to the Chinese Communists' regional activities, and became a key forum for the Nationalists to present their vision of Asian solidarity. APACL presented itself as an alternative to the non-aligned movement, particularly in the wake of the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung, Indonesia. The history of the League raises the question of whether there existed an anti-communist internationalism, and exposes the barriers to such multinational cooperation in 1950s East Asia. These obstacles did not result from Mao Zedong's machinations but rather due to rivalries and disputes among the leading anti-communist nations.

APACL grew from failed attempts to create a Far Eastern NATO. The first discussions of what would become APACL occurred in the context of Chiang's advocacy of a regional military alliance from 1949 through 1952. The formal inauguration of the League grew out of the final statement issued after the November 1953 visit of Syngman Rhee to Taiwan. Rhee called upon Asia's anti-communist leaders to meet the following year in Korea to inaugurate this new organization. Koreans and Chinese began to battle over the problem of Japanese participation and where subsequent meetings would be held. While the Koreans ensured that no Japanese would participate, the Nationalists sought to increase their influence through Overseas Chinese. Many of the Southeast Asian delegations were in fact headed by Overseas Chinese closely connected to the Nationalist Party. Delegates gathered in Korea in June 1954 to hear speeches from Syngman Rhee and other South Korean politicians, to

present reports on anti-communist efforts in their respective countries, to pass resolutions denouncing neutrality or non-alignment, and to announce the formal establishment of the League. The China Chapter of APACL was established on July 31, 1954, shortly after the Nationalist delegation returned from Korea.

Although hopes for a multilateral military alliance were dead, the 1955 meeting was Chiang's best chance to portray Taiwan as the regional center of an anti-communist crusade. The Generalissimo personally pushed to involve Japanese in the League, and to expand participation to include South Asia and Middle Eastern nations. By mid-May 1955, even Nationalist sources could not deny that the Koreans were threatening to stay home if Japanese attended the APACL meeting. The Nationalists undertook a massive propaganda effort on Taiwan to emphasize the importance of this conference. Similar messages were sent through Overseas Chinese networks. Despite attempts to find compromise by sending envoys such as Hang Li-wu to Seoul, the Koreans called the Nationalists' bluff and refused to attend, humiliating Chiang. After the failure in Taipei, the next major conference was planned for Manila in 1956. The Nationalists grudgingly accepted the Korean position on Japanese participation. At the third conference, held in Saigon in March 1957, the Council elected Ku Cheng-kang as League Chairman, but selected Saigon as the site of the Permanent Secretariat. The Nationalists proved unable to dominate the League or regional anti-communist efforts.

The League experience also highlighted the role of personal tensions and rivalries within the anti-communist ranks. For example, the relationship between Chiang and South Korean strongman Syngman Rhee was contentious. I believe that discord between Taipei and Seoul grew from the War of Resistance and immediate post-war era. Chinese Nationalist sympathies for Korean independence were long-standing. Since the 1920s, China had been home to non-communist Korean nationalists who were in obvious danger if they remained in

the Japanese colony. However, looking at the secondary literature in Chinese and materials from the Academia Historica, it became clear Chiang and the Nationalists had developed good relations with Koreans other than Syngman Rhee, who was tied to the Americans. Nationalist records closely tracked the education and career backgrounds of South Korean leaders and advisors to Rhee. While Rhee and those with long-term ties to the Chinese Nationalists such as Kim Koo could agree on purging communists from below the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, they also engaged in an extremely heated contest for influence among themselves. In short, Rhee was well-aware that the Chinese Nationalists had backed other Koreans. I found materials in the Academia Historica where Chiang and his representative in South Korea, Shao Yulin, try to reduce Rhee's perception that the National government opposed him. In order to improve relations, Chiang offered arms to Rhee--basically offering to supply the American weapons that the Truman Administration refused to provide.<sup>4</sup> By the start of the Korean War, the Nationalists had given up hope that a "China" faction would play a significant role in South Korean politics. For example, Nationalist officials dissuaded the son of a rival of Rhee from visiting Taipei for secret talks with Chiang, stating that his visit would have to go through proper channels—and presumably become known to the South Korean leader. The disagreements over membership and leadership of the League should be seen in the context of larger conflicts between strong-willed individuals such as Rhee and Chiang.

The League illustrated the limits of anti-communist cooperation. It was hampered by many of the problems that plagued the proposals for a multilateral military alliance. First, as the conflict over Japanese participation made abundantly clear, national priorities or domestic politics triumphed over regional solidarity. Beyond the relatively straight-forward power

---

<sup>4</sup> Note: I am still working on a cache of documents where Chiang and his representatives in Seoul discuss how to use South Korea as a base for intelligence gathering and propaganda in Manchuria. One problem the Nationalists had was how to justify the number of large aircraft assigned to the embassy, then to use those aircraft over Manchuria. The Americans were not informed of these plans, which I do not think came to fruition because of the start of the Korean War.

struggles over issues such as membership in the League, each delegation perceived a different communism. The Nationalists saw the communist threat and the appropriate response through the prism of their historical experience. To mainland refugees on Taiwan, the defeat of communism began with a struggle against Mao's regime, not Kim Jong-il's or Ho Chi Minh's government. Second, the League could not find a formula to define the role of the United States or Japan, the two great powers in the region.<sup>5</sup> The contributions the United States made to support the crusade against communism overwhelmed anything Asian nations could have done together, and obviated the need for regional ties. Third, the development of various chapters was uneven. The Nationalists made a great effort to promote the League on Taiwan, but in many nations, APACL was little more than a branch office of the Nationalist Party. The drive by some Nationalists to ensure that Overseas Chinese controlled national delegations offered a short-term victory for the regime. In the long run, however, I believe it undermined the legitimacy of the organization in the eyes of indigenous populations of Southeast Asia.

Finally was the problem of ideology. The League never articulated a post-communist future, and never presented a concrete plan for political, social, or economic change. Other than for the Japanese or Overseas Chinese, anti-communist solidarity also proved difficult to meld with the Nationalists' guiding ideology, Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles of the People. The anti-communism of the League lacked the ideological claims to universalism that existed for followers of Marxism, Leninism, Stalinism, and Maoism. While Moscow could reasonably see itself as the international home of communism and Beijing could declare itself the model for third-world revolutionaries, anti-communism was diffuse, and no one state could claim greater legitimacy than any other. Chiang could never make a credible case for

---

<sup>5</sup> The United States did not participate. American diplomats were unhappy to discover that APACL associated with groups like the Anti-Bolshevik League, an organization that included Eastern Europeans who had collaborated with the Nazis. American diplomats felt that American participation would delegitimize the League.

why Taiwan should be the center of an anti-communist campaign.

### **Overseas Chinese: Mothers of the Revolution**

The fourth facet of Chiang's regional efforts was the political mobilization of Overseas Chinese (華僑, *huaqiao*). In theory, this transnational community bolstered the Nationalists' international legitimacy, boosted morale on Taiwan, lobbied other nations to recognize the government in Taipei, provided investment and donations, and gathered intelligence. The Nationalists hoped that Overseas Chinese would support other elements of regional diplomacy. For example, they were to promote formal alliances and to bolster popular support for the regime in Taipei. APACL could link Overseas Chinese and indigenous anti-communist leaders and helped advocate for military alliances among anti-communist states. Other elements of the Nationalists' regional strategies would, in turn, promote Overseas Chinese work. In January 1953, the Foreign Ministry combined traditional diplomacy and *huaqiao* affairs by announcing that ambassadors would be responsible for protecting Overseas Chinese property, organizing *huaqiao*, and advocating anti-communist national salvation efforts.

In the English-language scholarship, we know a great deal about the Nationalists' attempt to mobilize *huaqiao* to begin a revolution on the mainland, but much less about their programs to save that revolution after the retreat to Taiwan. Their Cold War contributions were portrayed as a logical extension of a revolutionary crusade that began with Sun Yat-sen over half a century earlier. It proved difficult for Chiang to claim legitimacy as China's leader when Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communists governed all but Taiwan and a few other small islands. Despite their Manichean rhetoric, however, the Communists and Nationalists shared many of the same goals, programs, and problems. Wang Gungwu writes that both parties deemed Overseas Chinese "targets for resinicization". In this process, both attempted to define China to *huaqiao*, particularly those in Southeast Asia. "China" was not

static, but represented a combination of long-held political, cultural, and social values and symbols; the political ideology that underpinned each party's world view; and Machiavellian expediency. Throughout their competition, the Communists and the Nationalists faced suspicion or outright hostility from the indigenous populations of newly-independent nation-states, and had to navigate a myriad of political agendas among Overseas Chinese that did not fit neatly into civil war or Cold War contexts.

Cheng Yen-fen became the most important leader in Overseas Chinese affairs after the move to Taiwan. In 1950, he became a member of the Central Reform Committee, and head of the Committee's Third Section, which managed overseas affairs. He also headed the Overseas Bureau (海外部) of the Nationalist Party and the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission (僑務委員會) under the Executive Yuan, thus combining party and government activities under a single individual. The Nationalists admitted that Overseas Chinese work had halted due to the retreat to Taiwan, and began again only with the selection of Cheng as chair of the Commission in 1952. In fact, Standing Committee meeting minutes contain discussion of the problems in Overseas Chinese work. Chiang, Chen Cheng, Cheng, and others focused on the defects of Overseas Bureau leaders, which were portrayed as a subset of larger problems of corruption and ineptitude in the Nationalist ranks. In particular, materials from the party's Central Reform Committee illustrate how Chiang sought to improve Overseas Chinese mobilization, and purge the party cells of those who lacked standing in their communities or dedication to the Nationalist cause.

Under Cheng's leadership, organization and propaganda work increased dramatically, including visits from *huaqiao* delegations, conferences, and publications. Cheng's programs, usually placed in the context of the historical ties between Sun Yat-sen and Overseas Chinese, became frequent topics in the Nationalist-controlled media. The Nationalists took care to report at every major holiday, particularly Double Ten Day, the delegations of

Overseas Chinese who came to express their solidarity with Chiang. In 1952 the Commission began its own monthly magazine, *Qiaowu yuekan* (Overseas Chinese Affairs Monthly), which detailed *huaqiao* work. Further, through the *Haiwai chubanshe* (Overseas Press), Cheng and his associates published a series of works designed to instruct Overseas Chinese and persuade them to cooperate with the Nationalists. Volumes such as *Qiaobao ying ruhe fangong* (How overseas compatriots should oppose communism) started with the maxim “fangong kang’e tuanjie di yi” (first unite to oppose communism and resist Russia), then provided more detailed tasks for building a better relationship between *huaqiao* and the regime on Taiwan. The press also constantly connected the legacy of 1911 to China’s unfinished civil war. For example, volumes like *Guofu zai haiwai* (The father of the nation abroad) were tributes to Sun and his loyal supporters, particularly in East and Southeast Asia. Cheng authored more specific volumes on cultural and education policies, and general collections of essays detailing the Commission’s work.

Beginning in 1953, October 21 became Overseas Chinese Day (*Huaqiaojie*). The first Overseas Chinese Day displayed the full range of the Nationalists’ propaganda tactics. Celebrations included speeches by top officials; meetings around the world; a radio play, “From Darkness to Light”, which detailed communist conspiracies among Overseas Chinese in Indonesia; a song, “Great Overseas Chinese” (*Weida de Huaqiao*); and countless declarations of support from other youth, labor, Christian, and women’s groups. The first Day culminated with an outdoor ceremony with over 1,000 *huaqiao* in a Taipei stadium. Finally, the Nationalists established the Overseas Chinese Policy Study Society (*Qiaozheng xuehui*) to investigate ways to better serve this constituency. The Society was headed by many of the same people who managed the party’s overseas work. By 1954, the Cold War program for Overseas Chinese work had been established.

The largest problem in Overseas Chinese mobilization was lack of interest. A British

secret report prepared in 1953 offered a detailed analysis and statistical data on the 10 million Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia. The report noted that “Only a small portion of Overseas Chinese are politically minded, in the sense of being interested in the politics of the country in which they live or in those of their mother-country. Only a small proportion have definite loyalties to the K. M. T. or the Communists.” Among this “small proportion,” the Nationalists struggled to balance the benefits of Overseas Chinese mobilization with the hostility it provoked. For example, during the 1950s, Cheng was not welcome in Malaya or Singapore. British and indigenous officials felt his presence would increase tensions with the Malaya population and spark conflict among Chinese during the delicate decolonization process. Any attempt to highlight the economic or political potential of Overseas Chinese raised concerns among the indigenous populations of the region. In Burma, the Nationalist Party was illegal, and hostility toward wealthy Chinese in Indonesia made mobilization there dangerous even in the 1950s.

The Philippines serve as one example of the compromises necessary for Overseas Chinese work. In the mid 1950s, a movement to “Filipinize” businesses in the Philippines was directed squarely at Overseas Chinese, who were seen as dominating the economy. Several thousand Overseas Chinese were arrested in the name of fighting communism—exactly the sort of decisive action that, in theory, Chiang supported. The archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the Academia Sinica have notes from awkward meetings between Philippine and ROC diplomats, where the Nationalists try to find some formula to discover which Overseas Chinese should be arrested and which should be released. In the Philippines, and elsewhere, the Nationalists kept discovering that anti-communist campaigns could be unleash anti-Chinese sentiment. Making it more difficult was the fact that the Chinese had overstayed visas (but I am not sure the Nationalists wanted them sent back to Taiwan). Chiang and the Nationalists were sometimes perceived in the Philippines as being

very close to Quirino and the Liberal Party, further complicating these efforts. Magsaysay's election in 1953 did not lead to a dramatic change in Sino-Philippine relations, but ties were definitely cooler. The final compromise was to release Overseas Chinese as they were investigated but no permanent solution was achieved. This gave the Philippines leverage to raise the issue in the future. Based on the documentation I have gathered to date, politicians in Manila wanted to focus on state to state relations with the ROC, and saw APACL and Overseas Chinese as creating troublesome domestic interest groups.

### **Conclusion**

The four strategies of the Nationalists' regional coalition building efforts contained idealism and lofty goals brought to earth by national rivalries and messy compromises. Chiang's dream of making his island redoubt into a headquarters for a regional anti-communist struggle did not come to fruition. The Nationalists did not draw the United States into a regional alliance, but did enjoy a bilateral pact. Chiang was unable to achieve the rearming of Japan, or its rapid reintegration into the regional diplomacy. He and his lieutenants did, however, find ways to cooperate with strongly anti-communist Japanese and to utilize the expertise of retired Japanese military officers. The Philippines and South Korea refused to join a military alliance with the ROC, but did support groups like APACL. It is difficult to prove that Overseas Chinese mobilization accomplished much. It may have done more to harm the ROC by angering indigenous elites in Southeast Asia. Nationalist policies did, however, allow the government and party to maintain some support and legitimacy among this vital constituency. Between 1949 and 1955, the Nationalists came to terms with the international consequences of defeat on the mainland. They did this when nationalism among its potential allies was at its strongest.<sup>6</sup>

Can lessons be drawn from the 1949 to 1955 period? History does not repeat itself,

---

<sup>6</sup> In his comprehensive study of diplomacy in Southeast Asia, Russell H. Fifield notes that "The consistently strongest force in Southeast Asia is nationalism." He adds that this nationalism "had distinct racial overtones." Russell H. Fifield, *The Diplomacy of Southeast Asia, 1945-1958* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), 437.

but it does, as Mark Twain said, “rhyme”. In that spirit, I will offer a couple of thoughts. First, reliance upon the United States can reduce the legitimacy of smaller states like Taiwan. Second, the United States can easily undermine regionalism based on how it supports its allies. Third, competing bureaucracies and agendas within the ROC can be a damaging as anything Beijing might attempt. Fourth, efforts to work with constituencies within other nation-states, such as occurred with APACL and Overseas Chinese, may create serious difficulties for “regular” diplomatic efforts. Fifth, as evidenced by the interaction between Chiang, Rhee, and Quirino, personalities matter. Sixth, even well-planned and implemented foreign policies can be overwhelmed by domestic politics as opposition parties seek to replace incumbents.