ASIA IN FOCUS

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Editorial Note

Welcome to the first issue of Asia in Focus at its new home, the Centre for East and Southeast Asian Studies at Lund University. We are honored to take stewardship of this important journal, mindful of the role it has played in nurturing junior scholars across the Nordic region over the years. This transition, from the esteemed Nordic Institute for Asian Studies (NIAS) at Copenhagen University, marks a new era in the history of this journal, yet, we remain committed to upholding the standards of academic rigor and excellence that have been its hallmark for years.

Asia in Focus' mission to serve as a platform for early career scholars has never been more important. Where once a young scholar's publishing career began after the completion of a PhD, today having an article published is becoming a prerequisite to even getting on to a PhD programme. Therefore, Asia in Focus continues to act as a much-needed bridge, enabling early career scholars to reach a wider audience, and thus for the next generation of scholars to have their voices heard.

Open Access remains the heart of this mission. As a truly open access journal, Asia in Focus stands apart. There are no fees to submit or to publish—an unwavering commitment that breaks down barriers to knowledge dissemination. This is a commitment that we, at Lund University, are deeply proud to uphold. We believe that scholarship thrives when knowledge is accessible to all, and that the vast profits made by commercial publishers – which come directly out of education budgets and are built on the backs of the free labour and goodwill of scholars – are immoral. We hope that Asia in Focus can help point towards an alternative model.

We wish to extend our profound gratitude to the Nordic Institute for Asian Studies (and a special shout-out to Inga-Lill Blomqvist for her patience and persistence!). Their tireless efforts and dedication have laid a solid foundation for Asia in Focus. We hope to respect their legacy by maintaining their commitment to academic excellence and inclusive scholarship.

We should also address the delay in publication of this issue. The transition process took longer than initially planned and we are immensely grateful to our authors for their patience and understanding throughout this period. We believe that your scholarly contributions are worth the wait, and we are excited to share these with our readers.

So, while this editorial transition marks a new phase for Asia in Focus, we are privileged to build on solid foundations, and our ethos remains the same: to provide early career scholars with an open access, peer-reviewed platform to share their research.

Karin, Nicholas, and Paul,
Lund University
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Are We Under Siege?
US Popular Perceptions of Japan and China in the Post-Cold War Era

STEPHEN RANGER

With the end of the Cold War, the early 1990s witnessed a peak in Japan-bashing within popular discourse in the United States. Such sentiments though declined as Japan's economy weakened from the mid-1990s and were replaced by new fears of China following the Taiwan Strait Crisis 1995/6. This article seeks to trace and contrast the perceptions of Japan and China during the 1990s as represented in the techno-thriller genre of popular US literature. The findings will show that Japan was treated as more of an existential threat to America than China due to historical factors and the strong economic presence in the US. This has relevance for interpreting how China will be perceived in the 2020s as its economy becomes more prominent in the US.

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When the bestselling author Michael Crichton released his novel *Rising Sun* (1992), he intended it to be a wake-up call for the United States (US). Critics though felt otherwise, with some considering it to be racist in its depictions of Japanese characters. This was after all a period when Japan-bashing in the US was at its peak as Japanese companies became increasingly present in American life through both consumer goods and the acquisition of property and land. The media was frequently running sensationalist stories about the imminent takeover of the US economy by Japan. In popular culture too, Japanese business was becoming more pervasive, as can be seen in *Die Hard* (1988), *Black Rain* (1989), and *Back to the Future Part II* (1989).

This fever, though, died down as Japan's economy began to slow steadily in the mid-1990s and these companies retrenched back to the homeland or focused on other parts of Asia. At the same time, China began to be seen as a new challenge for the US, notably after the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1995/6 (Scobell, 2000). During this period, a new trend of China-bashing began to emerge and reached its peak with the Wen Ho Lee espionage case (1999) and the Hainan Island incident in which US and Chinese aircraft collided (2001), before the events of 9/11 and the War on Terrorism changed focus. With China reoccupying US attention in the 2020s, it is worthwhile to reexamine the experience of the 1990s.

This article seeks to analyze US popular perceptions toward Japan and China during the 1990s. It examines the contrasts that existed in these two trends during a time when the US was enjoying its unipolar moment. To accomplish this, the article examines popular US techno-thriller novels to consider the extent and nature of Japan/China-bashing and the differences between them. The first section outlines the approach and literature, while the following parts explore the perceptions in techno-thrillers for Japan and China. The last section explores some of the implications of this historical China-bashing for our present moment in the 2020s and the conclusion sums up the main findings.

An Approach toward Identifying Perceptions

When discussing Japan/China-bashing, it is important to be aware of its linkages with the past. Much of it is rooted in the "Yellow Peril" discourse that emerged in the late nineteenth century where popular literature in Europe and America portrayed Asians in negative racist stereotypes, instilling fear and worry in readers. Blue (1999) has covered extensively the growth in "Yellow Peril" discourse among European countries, its impact upon policies at the time, and overall reflection of modernity in European societies. Young (1993) has demonstrated how such discourse has continued throughout history into the Japan-bashing of the 1990s.

Why are techno-thrillers relevant for this study? This genre emerged during the 1980s in which technology, specifically those associated with military applications, were as important to the novel as the characters themselves. Notably,

the authors of such novels are presented through their profile as authorities on the topic that they are writing about. The choice of such a genre of novels for this paper is that they were arguably the biggest selling publications before the routinization of the internet. In fact, Tom Clancy's C*lear and Present Danger* (1989) was the number one selling novel of the 1980s (Elhefnawy, 2009).

Four books have been selected for analysis. For Japan, Clive Cussler's *Dragon* (1990) and Tom Clancy's *Debt of Honor* (1994) were chosen while for China, Dale Brown's *Fatal Terrain* (1997) and Tom Clancy's *The Bear and the Dragon* (2000) were included. There are many other techno-thrillers, for example Stephen Coonts' *Fortunes of War* (1998) or Richard Herman's *The Power Curve* (1997), focused on Japan and China respectively, but the four selected for this article are the more prominent examples on account of the authors' prior performance on the New York Times bestseller list (Clancy's novels topped the list in years of their release).

Previous studies on this topic have used works of fiction or mass media. Regarding Japan-bashing, both Mostow (1999) and Morris (2013) examined Crichton's *Rising Sun*. However, their works are limited to just that novel as well as to the specific case of Japan-bashing. Regarding China-bashing, studies such as Ramierz (2012) and Ramierz & Rong (2012) have sought to identify the negative ways in which China is depicted in the mass media. However, linkages with popular media are more limited. Therefore, expanding the scope to a contrast between negative perceptions toward Japan and China during the same period makes for a valid point of further study.

Perceptions of Japan in US Techno-Thrillers

One of the first novels to cover Japan in the techno-thriller genre was *Dragon* (1990) by Clive Cussler featuring his long-suffering hero, Dirk Pitt. Set in 1993, the plot features a Japanese indus-

trialist, Hideki Suma, who seeks to establish Japan's global dominance by secretly planting nuclear bombs around the world that can be used to blackmail international governments (known as Project Kaiten).

With this novel, Japanese business as represented by Suma is the main adversary and is described in somewhat Orientalist terms, "By Western standards he was short, by Japanese ideals he was slightly on the tall side, standing at 170cm" (Cussler, 1991: 139). Although Suma operates from behind the scenes, the Japanese government is depicted as impotent and only serving his interests. As one US official in the novel puts it, "the politicians don't run Japan" (Cussler, 1991: 250).

The fact that Project Kaiten involves planting nuclear devices inside select units of a popular Japanese car model (subtly described as a "fertilizer-brown" color) and exported by Suma's company is another representation of the threat posed by Japanese consumer goods. Furthermore, the secretive nature of the plot to bolster Japan's power reflects the popular theme at the time that the US has been sleeping as described in Prestowitz Jr.'s *Trading Places: How We Allowed Japan to Take the Lead* (1988). In another case, the reader is presented with popular American trade fears when Congresswoman Loren Smith (Pitt's love interest) grills a Japanese securities executive during a congressional subcommittee on unfair business practices and the acquisition of land: "The rape of California by the Japanese business community will never happen" (Cussler, 1991: 182). It should be noted that in 1989, the year before the publication of the novel, the US government had put Japan under a Section 301 investigation for unfair business practices while in 1987 a group of Congressmen famously smashed a Toshiba radio player on the steps of Congress.

The cultural clashes in this novel though become cruder as they go beyond the world of business. In many cases, Suma never hesitates to express the cultural superiority of Japan which

brings about a vociferous defense by the main characters. For example, when Smith and Pitt are kidnapped by Suma, they are embroiled in a debate about which country holds the moral high ground. Suma contends that the US is a land of criminals and racists because of its mixed cultures to which Pitt counters that Japan is rife with corruption and its own form of racism. Smith concludes, as if speaking for the American reader, that "'our society isn't perfect, but people to people, our overall quality of life is still better than yours'" (Cussler, 1991, p.364). Generally, such clashes serve to ferment increased anger at Suma (and by extension such Japanese industry types who the reader is led to believe all harbor resentment over World War II). In many respects, *Dragon* almost serves as an uncompromising rebuke to Shintaro Ishihara and Akio Morita's *The Japan That Can Say No: Why Japan Will Be First Among Equals* which was released in 1989.

Relatively more subtle in its descriptions, Tom Clancy's *Debt of Honor* (1994) carries on with similar themes but echoes more the political/military fears laid out in Friedman and LeBard's *The Coming War with Japan* (1991), which was published in the run-up to the US presidential elections in 1992. This campaign trail was notably marked by tough talk about Japan by all candidates. One of whom, the moderate Democrat Paul Tsongas summed up the political mood of the time by stating "The cold war is over, and Japan won" (Shapiro, 1992). A key concern in Friedman's book was that with the demise of the Soviet threat, Japan would no longer need to rely upon the US for its security. Given Japan's growing indigenous military capabilities, the fear was that a trade dispute could become a potential military conflict.

Friedman further points out two factors that would play a role, Japan's lack of natural resources and the reduction of US forces in the Pacific. Both feature in Clancy's novel with the limited number of US forces used by Japan as an Achilles' heel to gain the advantage which would then facilitate Japan's efforts to address the shortage of natural resources. Still, the principal adversary in *Debt of Honor* is again an industrialist Raizo Yamata who takes advantage of a trade war between the US and Japan to install a nationalist prime minister, Hiroshi Goto, and push ahead with a military plan to control the Western Pacific. Although the Japanese military is very much involved in this novel, it is the industrialists who pull the strings.

When *Debt of Honor* was released, there was criticism that the book portrayed Japanese characters in a stereotypical fashion (Buckley, 1994). Such representations seek to create cultural clashes that are very evident in the novel. For example, the hysteria over Japanese firms owning US property is manifested in the fact that Yamata owns large areas of land on the Marianas Islands which is then used as a nefarious justification for military occupation. Elsewhere, Japanese automobiles provoke the initial trade war after safety failures cause the deaths of several people. But perhaps the most evident form of cultural clash is in the depiction of Japanese Prime Minister Goto's blonde American mistress (like the murder victim in *Rising Sun*) who is the subject of his sexual obsession. This very much mirrors the stereotypical views of Japanese men seeking American women, mirroring power imbalances across the Pacific (Mostow, 1999). As Goto states about his mistress in a blunt fashion, "I love f***ing Americans" (Clancy, 1994: 183). Buckley's (1994) book review picked up on this depiction and its use to inflame feelings, "It all plays into the crudest kind of cultural paranoia, namely, that what these beastly yellow inscrutables are really after is -- our women."

Perceptions of China in US Techno-Thrillers

The Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1995-1996 brought to US public attention the potential for a military conflict with China in the post-Cold War period. In the wake of this crisis, books like Bernstein and Munro's *Coming Conflict with China* (1997) posited

that China will seek to challenge the US hegemony in East Asia and that Taiwan will be the catalyst in this contest. Reflecting these concerns, Dale Brown's *Fatal Terrain* (1997) is a military-focused techno-thriller novel that depicts China's efforts to retake Taiwan (after it declares independence) and secret US efforts to thwart it. The influence of the Taiwan Strait Crisis is clear in the literal "ripped from headlines" introduction which quotes several news articles and analytical reports.

In contrast with the novels featuring Japan, the main adversary in *Fatal Terrain* is an ambitious Chinese military official Sun Ji Guoming who puts into place a deceptive and subtle plan to take over Taiwan. The first point to note is that the conflict is entirely political, in the opening scene, Taiwan formally declares independence, which pushes Sun to implement his plan. In this respect, there are no shadowy industrialists pushing around impotent political leaders nor are there any leadership changes, the communist party is very much in charge. Even the military figures profess complete loyalty to the leadership despite their own secret maneuverings.

The plan to take over Taiwan is portrayed in *Fatal Terrain* as deceptive and cunning (secretly disabling US aircraft carriers or false flag attacks). Evidently this approach is rooted in Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, which the character Sun Ji Guoming frequently quotes from as if a religious text. When the novel was released, *The Art of War* was familiar among American audiences, particularly in business circles where it was associated with secretly gaining the upper hand against rivals. Brown in his novel simply uses *The Art of War* to understand how China would be able to take on the US given the obvious military power disparity. This was in line with the strategic culture approach in academia that was put forward by Alastair Ian Johnston's *Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy* (1995). Moving away from traditional measures of power competition (economic or military measures), Johnston posited the importance of cultur-

al thinking for China, for whom the international stage was perceived as zero-sum and therefore required more deceptive measures to gain the advantage. This makes sense for *Fatal Terrain* as the Chinese military is generally depicted as technologically inferior, especially when compared to how the Japanese military was portrayed in *Debt of Honor* or even the private security forces in *Dragon*.

Tom Clancy's *The Bear and the Dragon* (2000) moves beyond strategic culture to more civilization conflicts à la Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizations. While it is like *Fatal Terrain* in that it portrays ambitious political figures seeking to expand China's power following Taiwan's independence, much of the novel is devoted to a clash between the US and China over human rights. It should be recalled that human rights was a prominent theme in American popular discourse during the late 1990s. The perils of Richard Gere over his support for Tibetan issues were well publicized and were further reflected in his film *Red Corner* (1998). Brad Pitt also found himself in hot water with Chinese authorities when he starred in *Seven Years in Tibet* (1997).

The key event regarding human rights in the novel is the killing by China's security forces of the Vatican's representative who was trying to stop a state-forced abortion of a Christian woman. The main protagonist of the novel—Jack Ryan who is the US president—responds to this incident in a press interview by comparing China's one-child policy to Nazi Germany, stating "Both countries shared a view of population control that is antithetical to American traditions" (Clancy, 2000: 449). Later in the novel, there are frequent references to China as uncivilized with regards to human rights, such as when Ryan discusses with his officials about granting China preferential trading rights, "And there's no way I was going to offer them MFN anyway, unless they decide to break down and start acting like civilized people" (Clancy, 2000: 445). Another key character is the CIA field officer

Chet Nomuri, whose inner monologue descriptions of China only serve to reinforce the civilizational differences, "China was an ancient land with an ancient culture, but in many ways these people might as well have been Klingons as fellow human beings, so detached was their societal values from what Chester Nomuri had grown up with" (Clancy, 2000: 154). One of the overriding images brought on by such depictions of China's human rights is that the US holds the moral high ground as the world's dominant power. Still, it is worth keeping in mind that at the time of its release, press reviews criticized Clancy for racist portrayals of Chinese characters (Fretts, 2000).

Later in the book, China seeks to acquire Siberia with all its mineral wealth from a weakened Russia but is thwarted when the plot is leaked. At this stage, the US moves to support Russia's membership to NATO so that it can defend against China's invasion. In the build-up to the conflict, there are many analogies to the horrors of the Nazi past. A notable example is when Ryan makes a visit to Auschwitz following Russia's ascension to NATO and symbolically makes a vow to himself for it to never happen again. Thereafter, the US military ships out to Siberia to help defend against China's invasion force. Still, unlike *Debt of Honor* where the Japanese military is technologically advanced, China's military is comparatively weaker. In one scene the US Air Force even wipes out an entire army unit with a few stand-off bombs and in the final scenes where China's desperate leadership launches its nuclear ballistic missiles at the US, they are all intercepted without any damage. China is never seen to gain the upper hand or weaken US power significantly. Thus, while it is portrayed in the novel as the 'other', it is still not a serious economic or military threat to the US supremacy.

Implications for US–China Relations in the 2020s

When looking at the current relations between China and the US, two implications can be drawn from this popular discourse during the post-Cold War period. The first is that Japan-bashing was very much rooted in a historical setting associated with World War II, thus it stirred deep emotions in the US at the time. By contrast, China has little historical connection to war with the US, the only period of direct fighting being the Korean War (1950–1953) which is not well remembered in the US.

Despite the lack of historical context in US–China relations, the COVID-19 pandemic may be creating a similar negative sentiment given the way in which it has led to an increase in anti-China perceptions mainly centered around the handling of the pandemic and even lab-leak theories. This trend is captured in the Pew Research Center's opinion poll on China's image which reveals a marked increase in negative views among Americans since 2020, with almost 82 percent of respondents expressing "unfavorable opinion" (Silver, 2022). It is interesting to note that this has not been reflected in popular culture. Throughout the 2010s, Hollywood has been notably muted in its portrayal of China. Given its interests in the Chinese market as well as the need to attract investors, Hollywood films have stayed away from any political topics regarding China and has even been showing a more positive side to the country (Schwartzel 2022). This is a notable difference from how Japan was portrayed in 1980s and 1990s in both Hollywood and the novels examined here.

The second aspect is in the omnipresent reach of Japanese companies in the US as well as the perceived threat of Japan to US territories in the Pacific. By contrast China's interests so far remain limited to its periphery. In the novels of the 1990s, China was seen as a relatively backward aspiring power. Its military was no challenge for the US while its economy was seen as dependent on American support. Even its nuclear deterrence failed as a direct threat. Contrast that with the final scene of *Debt of Honor* in which a Japanese airline pilot, who lost his brother in the conflict,

flies his 747 into the Capitol building wiping out much of the US government as a form or revenge.

Looking at the 2020s, the story is very different. China has a much larger economic presence and firms like Tik Tok or Huawei are provoking similar debates as there was with Japan. While the developments in China's military technology such as 'carrier-killer' missiles or stealth fighters are drawing concern from US observers about how the US should maintain its advantage (Bateman, 2022). Furthermore, the Trump administration took a tougher approach to trade while the Biden administration has continued this and has even announced unprecedented restrictions on the export of US microchips to China. It is interesting then to note that although US–China relations in the 2020s lack the historical sentiment of US–Japanese trade conflicts of the early 1990s, they are emerging to be as fierce in terms of policy tools adopted and the increase in negative perceptions.

Concluding Remarks

These novels reveal much about US perceptions in popular novels toward Japan and China during a period of seemingly unbridled American confidence. Culture clashes are a prominent theme, whether in business terms or military aspects. In each case, the US is generally shown to be superior, although with Japan the balance is more even. Furthermore, regarding Japan there is the overall hint that America has been caught sleeping as was a popular theme in the broader non-fiction literature. In particular, the idea that US military cutbacks and withdrawal of forces in the Pacific has weakened its power in the region both as a deterrence and response. Clancy makes a particular point about this in *Debt of Honor* where a weakened military posture in the Pacific as well as nuclear disarmament is exploited by the Japanese industrialists to expand their power. However, this is not so evident regarding China, which is depicted as a plucky, but not serious, challenger.

This is where the real difference between how Japan was perceived in early 1990s and how China was viewed in the mid to late 1990s becomes evident. Japan was seen to be more of a direct threat compared to China. Japan's economic dominance is not only depicted as eroding US power but is frequently displayed to be encroaching upon the American way of life through the acquisition of property and iconic landmarks or even entire states (Hawaii, California, or Saipan). Many of the Japanese industrialists in the novels perceive of their own culture as far superior and even wish to almost change how Americans live their lives. The clearest example of this is the Japanese securities chief in *Dragon* who comments, "Since the United States is in a state of decline and my nation is rising at an incredible rate, perhaps you should consider accepting our methods over yours. Your citizens should study our culture in depth. They might learn something" (Cussler, 1991: 181).

This contrasts with China which is not only portrayed as a weaker country but also offering little that Americans might wish to emulate while its economy has minimal impact on their everyday life. For example, whereas Japanese cars are omnipresent in *Debt of Honor* or *Dragon*, the only goods flowing from China to the US in T*he Bear and the Dragon* are Barbie dolls, which is, after all, a US brand produced using cheap Chinese labor. In fact, the distance between the US and China is alluded to by Sun Ji Guoming in *Fatal Terrain* who explains "I have studied the *tao* of the American military, and I have examined our *tao*, and my studies conclude that the Americans have no desire for prolonged battle in Asia" (Brown, 1997: 55). In other words, the US is more likely to fight a war with Japan over the Marianas Islands (US territory) or economic control of California, but less likely to launch air strikes to defend 'distant' Taiwan.

The sense of a direct threat posed by Japan is reinforced by linking with the past which would suggest that the conflict between the US and Japan has been unceasing since World War II. In *Dragon*, this is evident in the opening scene in

which at the end of World War II, a third US bomber carrying an atomic bomb is downed off the coast of Japan. At the end, Dirk Pitt recovers this weapon in a submersible and uses it to destroy Suma's secret base. The connection with World War II is also relevant in Suma's background as it is hinted that his motivations are in revenge for Japan's defeat in World War II.

Similarly, in *Debt of Honor* Yamata's parents committed suicide as US Marines advanced on Saipan during the closing stages of World War II. It is their memory and loss that Yamata dedicates his efforts to in the opening scene of the book and sets up the story of historical revenge, while also providing the title of the book. In contrast, in both novels, China is seen to be bitter about the post-Cold War situation that is not in their favor, mainly regarding Taiwan, but it does not extend to some unceasing historical conflict or revenge. Instead, the focus is on political or cultural differences, *The Bear and the Dragon* in particular highlights the civilizational conflict over human rights. But still there is a greater power disparity between the two while the military conflicts occur on China's periphery. Is the narrative different today? It could be argued that US–China relations in the 2020s is perhaps closely resembling that of Japan in the 1990s, the power gap has decreased while trade issues are fraught. The key question, though, is whether the negative sentiment toward China brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic will be a temporary trend or permanent mindset. This will need to be closely observed in the popular media.

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ISSUE 9

From the Backwaters of South China Sea History
Pratas at the Dawn of the Cold War

MAGNUS EITERJORD

Pratas Island in the South China Sea (SCS) is strategically located near major shipping routes, but its history remains largely unexplored. Occupied by the Republic of China (ROC) since 1946, it faced potential threats from the People's Republic of China's (PRC) simulated military drills in 2020, raising fears of a US-PRC conflict and spotlighting the island's significance. This article delves into Pratas' history, using new sources from the UK National Archives and CIA Archives. It highlights the island's role from the end of WWII in Asia in 1946 to the two Taiwan Strait crises in the 1950s. The island's geopolitical significance in the 1950s was influenced by strategic factors, keeping it relatively unnoticed until its integration into the Cold War dynamics of East Asia by 1958, a position it maintained until 2020.

Keywords: Pratas, China, Cold War in East Asia, Taiwan Strait crises, Geopolitics.

I n 2014, Bill Hayton published his book *The South China Sea: The Struggle for Power in Asia*. The book begins with a hypothetical scenario of how an island dispute between China[1] and the Philippines in the South China Sea (SCS) could escalate into a large-scale war and direct superpower conflict between the United States and China (PRC) (Hayton, 2014: 11–14). Since 2020, an island group largely forgotten in the history of the region dubbed by *The Economist* as the most "dangerous place on earth" has emerged (The Economist, 2021). In late 2020, tensions arose around Pratas Island as reports emerged that a PRC military exercise would simulate an occupation of it (Guo and Liu, 2020). Since then, experts and academics have pinpointed the island - which has been occupied by the Republic of China (Taiwan) since 1946 - as a potential catalyst for confrontation between the US and China. In 2021, both the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) and the Center for New American Security (CNAS) produced reports that identified Pratas as the most tempting SCS military objective for Beijing. CNAS, in their report, found few avenues for the US or its allies to stop an invasion of the island without escalating the conflict (Dougherty, Matuschak, and Hunter, 2021; Blackwill and Zelikow, 2021). With its connection to both the wider SCS conflicts and the issue of Taiwan's status *vis-à-vis* mainland China, it has emerged from the backwaters of the SCS and

spurred on anxieties of a new Taiwan Strait crisis. On 2 August 2022, tensions across the strait rose following then-US speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan (Tan and Molloy, 2022). As tensions continue to escalate across the strait, it has become as pertinent as ever to fully understand Pratas as a potential new 'battleground' in the Taiwan dispute and superpower politics between the US and China.

The contemporary situation and future problems can only be understood fully through a historical framework. Pratas have existed in the shadows of the SCS conflicts since WWII. Hence, it has remained a lacuna in the English historiography on the SCS. However, as this article will show, just because the island has avoided conflict does not mean it can be relegated from the history books. The article will begin to fill in this empty space and, with that, further our understanding of a complex conflict-filled region and a potential new chess piece on the SCS chessboard.

To help us understand the dynamics surrounding Pratas, this article will turn its focus on the watershed period in East Asian history between 1946–1958. It will present the island in the middle of two major historical developments: the Chinese Civil War and the inception of the Cold War in East Asia. Utilising previously unused archival material from the British National Archives and the CIA Archives, the article showcases both

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1 In this paper, China refers to the People's Republic of China (PRC), founded by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), whose government *de facto* governs the mainland and was established in 1949. It is today *de jure* recognised as the representative of China. Taiwan refers to the Republic of China (ROC), founded by the Chinese Nationalist Party Kuomintang (KMT), who escaped to the island of Taiwan and its surrounding islands in 1949 during the Chinese Civil War. The ROC has since governed over the island(s) and existed de facto independent but without international recognition.

Figure 1: Map of Pratas in the SCS. Source: https://istockphoto.com

British and American interests in the island but argues that neither was committed to actively safeguarding the island from communist takeover. This article argues that, during the 1950s, Pratas' absence came from its subordinate position to the overarching goal of the PRC to defeat the ROC on Taiwan. Once the US entered the region, the environment changed, but it did not alone stop PRC aggression against the offshore islands. This becomes apparent when analysing the first and second Taiwan Strait crises. The crises represent two events during the 1950s where high tensions between the PRC and ROC escalated into armed conflict over islands located in the Taiwan Strait.

This article finds that the PRC's strategic concerns and Pratas' unfavourable geographic position in relation to the goal of defeating the ROC were the main factors that kept the island absent until the end of the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis. Following the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis, the Cold War battle lines were solidifying, and Pratas had been incorporated into the Cold War disposition of the region.

Placing Pratas
At the disputed theatre of the SCS, the Spratly, Paracel, and Scarborough Islands have been the main flashpoints taking up the spotlight.

Strikingly, Pratas, the largest of the small islands in the SCS, has remained mostly absent from public contestation. The island, named Dongsha in Chinese, with its 12 square kilometres, is located in the northern part of the SCS, 320 km southeast of Hong Kong, 400 km southwest of Taiwan, and 500 km northwest of Luzon (Heinzig, 1976: 19; Chang, 2016: 1). Pratas is distinctly different from the other SCS islands as it is the only island in the SCS not claimed by two internationally recognised states but rather by China and Taiwan.

This connects Pratas to the Taiwan issue. Therefore, it is pertinent to address another set of islands. Across the strait from Taiwan, a few kilometres off the Chinese mainland, lies many small islands often referred to as 'the offshore islands'. The Kinmen (Quemoy) and Matsu (Nankan) islands are the largest. These islands were points of armed conflict between China and Taiwan in the 1950s, but Kinmen and Matsu have remained under Taiwan's control (Rushkoff, 1981: 466). Thus, Pratas can be compared with both the SCS and offshore islands and links the SCS and the Taiwan issue.

Historiography

Uncontested since the Japanese expansion into Southeast Asia during WWII, Pratas has existed in the backwaters of the SCS. The island has remained but a mention in passing while scholars focus on the Spratly, Paracel, and Scarborough Islands. The SCS historiography is vast. Already by 1924, German general and geographer Karl Haushofer had been one of the first to draw attention to the SCS's strategic importance (General CIA Records [Hereafter GCR], 1976). Since then, the historiography of the SCS has closely tracked the ever-developing situation in the region.

This is visible in the earliest English-language writings on the SCS conflicts, which were prompted by the 1974 Chinese invasion of the Paracel Islands. The first book on the topic was entitled *Disputed Islands in the South China Sea: Paracels, Spratlys, Pratas, Macclesfield Bank* and was published in 1976 by Dieter Heinzig, a German historian. Heinzig published the booklet as he wished "… to provide a solid basis of historical information for all those who wish to assess the conflict … and any future dispute that may arise in the South China Sea" (1). In the short booklet, Heinzig provides historical and geographical information on the islands of the SCS. However, Heinzig's inclusion of Pratas along with the other disputed islands in the title is slightly misleading, as Pratas has not been disputed between internationally recognised states since WWII.

Since then, only two English scholarly publications have devoted space to Pratas. First was Greg Austin's book *China's Ocean Frontier* from 1998. In it, he takes a China-focused approach and gives a comprehensive analysis of China's incentives and claims to the Paracel and Spratly Islands. By spending one paragraph questioning why Pratas was not attacked during the first two Taiwan Strait crises, Austin was the first author to shed light on the island. He did not, however, pursue this question further.

An article published by Bill Hayton (2019) is the only work to dedicate significant focus to Pratas. Hayton examines Pratas during the early 1900s, especially the Pratas Island crisis of 1909, where the Japanese government ended up recognising the Qing government's sovereignty over the territory. Furthermore, he analyses the event's role in the early development of China's territorial claims. However, Hayton's inquiry focuses on the period between 1909 and 1937. It stops in 1946, where this article picks up.

A Small Meteorological Station, Big Concerns

A meteorological station was built on Pratas in 1926 by the Republic of China. It provided invaluable meteorological information for British

Hong Kong. In 1937, the Japanese occupied the island and its weather station (GCR, 1956; National Archives [Hereafter NA], 1950a). At the end of WWII, the Japanese were ejected from Pratas, and the ROC forces retook control of the island and its weather station in 1946. Meanwhile, the Chinese Civil War continued on the mainland. On 1 October 1949, the communists proclaimed the People's Republic of China (Granados, 2006: 154.) In the years 1945–50, the US followed a policy of non-intervention and more or less accepted what it saw as the inevitable fall of mainland China to the communist forces (Muller, 1983: 17).

On 25 April 1950, a visiting British naval ship to Pratas reported that the ROC troops intended to soon withdraw from the island. The news raised concerns among British officials (NA, 1950b). Anticipating an invasion of Taiwan, the ROC had withdrawn most troops from the islands in the SCS to concentrate on defending Taiwan itself. In May 1950, ROC troops were withdrawn from Woody Island in the Paracels and Itu Aba in the Spratlys (Till, 2009: 31). Troops, however, remained on Pratas despite the island being located closer to the mainland than to Taiwan and far away from the course the PRC's navy would take in any invasion of Taiwan. The British - clearly concerned about the future of Pratas - had their hands tied due to their position in the Chinese Civil War after it had recognised the PRC on 6 January 1950 (NA, 1950a). Instead, in response to the report of ROC troops withdrawing from the island, the British repeatedly requested the Americans to put pressure on the ROC to maintain its presence and to "Persuade the Chinese nationalists to continue to operate the station on the grounds it is internationally important" (NA, 1950a).

Concerns surrounding Pratas intensified, and, on 5 June 1950, the Governor of Hong Kong sent a letter to the Secretary of State of the Colonies. He proclaimed the inevitable cessation of weather reports if communists took control of the island. He reiterated the importance of Pratas' weather reports for Hong Kong in defence against typhoons and for the British Navy. A US consulate member, in conversation with the Governor of Hong Kong, stated that "… some action should be taken about Pratas considering the information obtained from this station is vital for security in the area in the event of war, and even during cold war" (NA, 1950a). The Governor believed there was no way to secure the continuation of weather reports from Pratas without essentially occupying the island, and he believed the Americans were willing to contemplate this. On 22 June, the consensus was reiterated in a report from the Meteorological Office to the head of the Admiralty. It stated that one could track the communists advance on mainland China by where weather reports were reduced to basically nil. It also emphasised that the continuation of weather reports from Pratas was of vital importance (NA, 1950a). The island had become entangled in the great power rivalry in the region and with its regional players.

The primary British concern regarding Pratas had been the potential loss of essential weather reports for Hong Kong and the British and US Navy, either through ROC abandonment or PRC occupation. Regardless, the officials assumed they would be denied weather reports. On 14 June 1950, George Henry Hall, the political head of the British Royal Navy, suggested that the Foreign Office convince the ROC to keep running the weather station on Pratas while simultaneously coming to an agreement with the communists about future arrangements for weather reports. British officials were not keen to have such arrangements as they doubted the communists' reliability in future times of crisis. Convinced of the upcoming loss of weather reports, through either a PRC takeover or ROC abandonment, British and US officials laid contingency plans.

Neither the UK nor the US proved to be committed to protecting the weather station on Pratas by military means. Correspondence between

British officials emphasise that their position in the Chinese Civil War following British recognition of the PRC meant they could not contemplate any military actions to safeguard the island (NA, 1950a). Similarly, the US had at the time accepted a ROC defeat to the communists as inevitable. Therefore, their preferred solution was to seek an agreement with the Philippine Weather Bureau to deliver increased weather reports. On 16 August 1950, the Governor of Hong Kong received a letter from the British Legation in Manila confirming that the Philippines was prepared to increase weather reports in the event of cessation of reports from Pratas. The Americans also took part and, on 21 August, in a letter to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs in the Philippines, the American ambassador to the Philippines referred to British requests for increased weather reports and remarked their great value to the US Navy and Air Force. Less than a month later, on 9 September, Hong Kong received a letter from Manila confirming that the Philippine Weather Bureau was now in a position to transmit hourly weather reports from their weather station at Laoag (NA, 1950a). Ultimately, while the weather station gave Pratas strategic value, both the British and American officials seemed to view a communist takeover as inevitable. Thus, in an uncertain post-WWII world, neither proved willing to commit to the island by military means, instead opting for contingency plans. This raises the question: Why did the communists not bring force to bear on Pratas in 1950?

Enter the 7th Fleet

Initially, one might look to the weak maritime capabilities of the PRC and its non-existent navy prior to 1950. In 1949, the PRC had suffered great losses in a failed attempt to take the island of Hainan, relying on junks and rafts to attack the island situated just a few miles off the southern coast of the mainland. A second offensive in 1950 was more successful, but rather because of the ROC forces' lack of resistance than the

improvements of the People's Liberation Army-Navy (PLA-N) (Muller, 1983, p.16). In May 1950, the PRC took control of Hainan.

Hainan provided an ideal location from which to launch an invasion of Pratas. In 1950, British officials were convinced the ROC troops on the island would not be capable of stopping any PRC attack (NA, 1950b). According to a memorandum from the Office of Director of Central Intelligence to Henry Kissinger about Pratas in 1974, the ROC had not deployed a proper military garrison on the island until 1955, implying that the ROC troops present on the island prior were only the ones connected to the running of the weather station and not a defensive military force (Library of Congress [hereafter LC], 1974). The PRC had occupied an ideal position to launch an offensive on Pratas, and while its maritime capabilities were weak, it would not have required much effort by the PLA-N to dislodge the ROC forces present on the island - forces that the ROC already had contemplated withdrawing.

There seems to have been little will to prevent a communist takeover of Pratas directly. Contingency plans to get the weather reports elsewhere had been put in place by the US and the UK, the island itself was poorly defended, and the PLA-N, while nearly non-existent, possessed the minuscule requirements to dislodge the troops on the island. After capturing Hainan in May 1950, the PRC was looking to once and for all deal with the Nationalists and began planning the invasion of Taiwan. The probing was set to start in July, and the main assault was set for early August (Muller, 1983: 16-17). For the PRC, in the domestic and international environment in May and early June 1950, there was no strategic incentive to use troops to occupy Pratas. The island, small and isolated, was undoubtedly expected to follow suit in the event of a successful invasion of Taiwan. However, on 25 June 1950, North Korean forces crossed into South Korea, and the Korean War was a fact. Two days later, Harry S. Truman dispatched the US 7th

Fleet to the Taiwan Strait, stating, "... Accordingly I have ordered the 7th Fleet to prevent any attack on Formosa" (Truman, 1950).

Until then, the PRC had been preparing for an invasion of Taiwan. With the sudden US presence in the strait, the invasion plans were foiled (Austin, 1998: 72–73). In the wake of Truman's declaration, British officials no longer believed it likely that the communists would launch an invasion of Pratas. On 8 September 1950, the British Admiralty received information from the US 7th Fleet that the ROC intended to keep the island operational (NA, 1950b). With the outbreak of the Korean War, US policy changed to 'active containment', and the Taiwan Strait and the SCS islands were now seen in the light of the emerging Cold War. As a result, Pratas came to take on a new political and strategic meaning. The arrival of the US changed the environment and stymied the PRC's plans to invade Taiwan. It did not, however, stop the PRC from turning its aggression towards other ROC-held islands.

Pratas and the Offshore Islands

Between 1954 and 1958, two crises took place in the Taiwan Strait that centred around ROC-held islands on the China coast. In 1954, the First Taiwan Strait Crisis transpired. The PRC occupied the Yijiangshan and the Dachen Islands northeast of the Taiwan Strait. As a result of the PRC's aggression, Washington's hand was forced, and it signed the US–ROC Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) on 2 December 1954 (Sheng, 2008: 484–485). With the treaty, the US devoted itself to the defence of Taiwan, the Pescadores Islands, and "... such other territories as may be determined by mutual agreement" (Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of China. Art. II, V, VI. 1954). The last part of the treaty ushered in a US policy of strategic ambiguity. By keeping unclear which islands it would defend, the US aimed to deter PRC aggression (Tucker, 2009: 14). In 1958,

during the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis, the PRC showed that regardless of the MDT, it was willing to take some risks and probe the US' resolve. Austin (1998) questions Pratas' absence during the crises as he states that "... a move against ROC (Republic of China) forces in Pratas ... would have been a fairly natural progression" (70). Austin believed the PRC had little reason to infer that the US would react to an offensive on Pratas, and therefore, a different restraint must have been present. The PRC's actions in 1954 and 1958, after the US stationed its 7th Fleet in the Taiwan Strait and signed the MDT with the ROC, show that geopolitical concerns as the only restraining factor on the PRC towards ROC-held sea territories remain unconvincing.

A potential explanation lies in the geographical position of Pratas *vis-à-vis* the mainland and the offshore islands. According to Austin, when planning to occupy the ROC-held islands, the PRC followed a policy of north to south, large to small (Austin, 1998: 71). During the First Taiwan Strait Crisis, the focus was put on the coastal Dachen and Yijiangshan islands. Their position close to Shanghai, an economic centre for the PRC, made the ROC's presence on the islands a threat. At the time, most of the PRC's merchant fleet was located in Shanghai, and from nearby coastal islands, especially Dachen and Yijiangshan, the ROC could easily launch air raids against the city (Sheng, 2008: 481). The ROC had already utilised multiple islands stretching from Shanghai down south to the Taiwan Strait to launch naval operations and attacks to disturb the PRC's maritime trade and threaten the mainland (Muller, 1983: 67). The closest big port city to Pratas on the mainland was Hong Kong, which was under British control. Moreover, as Ulises Granados (2006: 171–172) shows using statistics from the 1950s, sea trade remained underdeveloped in the entire Guangdong province, the closest mainland province to Pratas. During the First Taiwan Strait Crisis, the position of Pratas *vis-à-vis* mainland economic

centres reduced the island's threat to the PRC and its strategic value.

In July 1958, the PRC began shelling the Kinmen and Matsu islands, launching the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis. Unlike the other offshore islands the PRC had attacked, Kinmen and Matsu are not located close to Shanghai. During the second crisis, the PRC's focus was on shelling the Kinmen and Matsu islands to force the ROC forces to evacuate while avoiding conflict with the US. During a meeting with the Politburo on 25 August, Chairman of the PRC, Mao Zedong said, "Our main purpose in shelling is not to gauge the GMD's [KMT] defences but to gauge the Americans' resolve, to test the Americans' determination." (Sheng, 2008: 491). Pratas was an unsuitable target for this purpose as it is located far outside shelling distance from the mainland. Furthermore, the Kinmen and Matsu islands' size and geographic proximity to the Chinese mainland meant they could serve as launching pads for an attempt to recapture the mainland by the ROC. The short distances to the mainland also provided logistical relief for the PRC as it could launch the attacks without having to traverse large bodies of open water or move into the Taiwan Strait. Since 1955, Pratas had been inhabited by a defensive military garrison positioned on the island by the ROC. This meant the PRC would have to send military vessels across a large stretch of open water that the US 7th Fleet could intercept and force the PRC to either abandon its mission or risk direct confrontation with the US. Unlike the coastal islands targeted during the first and second Taiwan Strait crises, Pratas presented limited strategic value to the PRC. The island could not be shelled from the mainland or be used to shell the mainland, nor did it provide a suitable launchpad for the ROC to invade the mainland. Ultimately, Pratas was of little strategic value in the PRC's plan to defeat the ROC on Taiwan. It could not help the PRC defeat the ROC, nor could it allow the ROC to threaten the PRC on the mainland. As a result, Pratas remained largely overlooked throughout the 1950s. By 1958, the frontiers of the Cold War were solidifying, and the window that had opened in May 1950 closed quickly.

Conclusion

This article set out to contribute to moving Pratas out of the shadows of history and shine a light on a pertinent piece of the SCS and Taiwan issue puzzle. The article has shown that while the island has remained outside the spotlight of history since WWII until recently, it has not been void of history. The article shows that Pratas' absence has not been the result of just being unimportant, forgotten, or ignored. Rather, its position followed calculated decisions made by the period's leading powers. Following WWII, the island existed in the consciousness and strategic thinking of the UK and the US, as shown by the sources from British National Archives and CIA Archives. In 1950, the PRC inhabited the position and the capabilities to occupy Pratas with little risk of facing international backlash.

However, this coincided with a period where the island existed as a subordinate goal to defeating the ROC on Taiwan once and for all. The environment began to change with the start of the Korean War and the arrival of the US 7th Fleet in the strait. Nevertheless, as shown by the first and second Taiwan Strait crises, the US presence did not entirely dissuade the PRC from making moves against ROC-held islands. Therefore, the article argues that there were other factors than solely the presence of the US that kept the island absent during the 1950s. When analysing Pratas against the other offshore islands attacked during this time period, its absence from armed conflict and contestation appears to be the result of Pratas' unfavourable geographical and strategic position *vis-à-vis* the mainland. Following the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis, the Cold War battle lines were drawn and the US showed its commitment to the ROC - and Pratas has since existed within this framework, a remnant of the Cold War.

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Performing God's Will
Agents of Christianity in Transnational Adoption from South Korea

JANE MEJDAHL

In 1954, the year after the Korean War came to a halt with the armistice agreement between North and South Korea, a devout Christian, Evangelical farmer couple from Oregon, Harry and Bertha Holt attended a film screening showcasing rather tragic circumstances of children born to US soldier fathers and South Korean mothers during the US military involvement in the Korean War 1950–1953, organised by leading Evangelical missionary organisation, World Vision (The Adoption History Project, n.d.). In her 1956 memoir, *The Seed from the East,* Bertha Holt recounts,

"We saw before us the tragic plight of hundreds of illegitimate children. GI-babies...children that had American fathers and Korean mothers... children that had been hidden by remorseful mothers until it was no longer possible to keep their secret. Finally the children were allowed to roam the streets where they were often beaten by other children who had never known Koreans with blond hair or blue eyes. (ibid.)."

World Vision encouraged everyone in the audience to sponsor a child in South Korea through their sponsor program (ibid.). However, sponsoring a child in South Korea did not prove to be enough for the Holts. In October 1955 the Holts landed in New York bringing with them 12 mixed-race children from South Korea out of which the Holts adopted eight themselves (Chung, 2021: 63). This event marked the beginning of the next 70 years of the Holts' facilitating adoptions from non-Western countries to the West. From South Korea alone, the Holts were responsible for more than half of the approximately 200,000 transnational adoptions to the West, mainly to the US, from the 1950s to today (Hübinette, 2005: 61).

The Holts' affiliation with Evangelical Christianity and their strong religious motivations serve as the point of departure for this essay. The main aim is to explore the role of religion in the foundation of transnational adoption from South Korea to the US during the early Cold War years. More particularly, I ask, how have Evangelical motivations and beliefs influenced the beginnings of transnational adoption from South Korea. I demonstrate that transnational adoption emerged in wake of the expansion of Evangelism in the US and in South Korea, and was underpinned by mutual geopolitical interests in East Asia during the first years of the Cold War. Informed by Talal Asad's idea that religion cannot be separated from power, but at the same time cannot be reduced to a mere disguise for political power (Asad, 1993: 116), I argue that religion, in the form of Evangelism, intersected with political interests and played an influential role in the formation of transnational adoption as a practice of producing and exercising authority in highly political contexts.

In the first part of the essay, I delve deeper into Asad's understanding of religion as a space for hu-

man practice as this notion informs my argument and I outline what I mean by religion as a practice of producing and exercising authority. Next, I describe the religious and political climate in the US and in South Korea during the early Cold War years with a particular focus on Evangelical expansion and the intersection with anti-communism. I then move on analyse how the Holts, exemplified in Bertha Holt's memoir, with the use of religious authority, advanced the idea of adopting South Korean children in the US. Lastly, I discuss how religious, Christian interests intersected with political powers that sought to strengthen ties between the US and South Korea as part of a mission for promoting global Christianity and a communism-free world.

Religion as a Practice of Producing and Exercising Authority

Masuzawa (2005) argues that historically the study of religion has been dominated by essentialising descriptions of non-Western religions focused on concrete facts and seemingly objective realities (p. 2). In his historisation of the study of religion Talal Asad (1993) similarly analyses how Western scholars influenced by modernity ideals have spurred a theoretical search for the essence of religion that has resulted in a conceptual separation of religion and power (p. 116). Asad borrows from Said (2003) and states that the problem is that societies of the Orient would be deemed 'backwards' or 'primitive' if they didn't follow the trajectory of the modern disenchantment project, meaning the separation of the religious from the secular, including in politics, law, and science (ibid.). In the study of religion of today, Asad claims, scholars have rejected both the essentialising analysis of religion as well as the idea that religion somehow only belongs to 'lesser-developed' societies. Instead scholars seek to understand religion as "[…] a distinctive space of human practice which cannot be reduced to any other" (p. 115).

In what follows I concur with Asad and understand religion as a space for human practice. If religion is to be understood as a space for human practice or "[…] as an activity rather than a state of mind […]" (Keane in Baffelli and Caple, 2019: 5), that space also holds capacity for the exercise of power or authority. Baffelli and Caple (2019) suggest that religious authority is expressed in the "[…] authority to act as media, making sense-able and cognizable that which remain beyond the senses" (p. 5, italics in the original). In my analysis below, I thus understand the practice of religious authority as the privilege to interpret and make sense of the world. Furthermore, I focus on the practice of religious authority in highly political contexts. Asad (1993) stipulates that religious power cannot be conflated with mere political power (p. 116). However, in line with DuBois (2011) who puts forward that religion is both an agent of political change and a symptom of it (p. 7), I argue that religious interests intersected with political interests and shaped mutually beneficial relations between the US and South Korea in the early Cold War years, illustrated in the foundation of transnational adoption.

The Cold War and Political Mobilisation of Evangelism

Turner and Salemink (2015) claim that scholars of religion only rarely include Christianity in definitions of so-called Asian religions despite it being present in several East and Southeast Asian countries (p. 4). Particularly in South Korea, Christianity has enjoyed wide success. Protestantism has the country's largest following with more than 19% of the population identifying as Protestant Christians in 2015 (Choi, 2020: 279). Although Protestantism was introduced already in the late 19th century, it wasn't until a series of Evangelical campaigns took the country by storm in the 1950s that the expansion took off (ibid.). Since then, Christianity has been deeply entangled in the modern political development on the Korean peninsula. South Korea's first president, Syngman Rhee, was

a fervent Evangelical Presbyterian (Park, 2007: 2), the democracy movement of the 1980s was heavily supported by Christian churches (Chang, 1998: 438), and in the current political climate success almost always entails a devotion to Christianity (Choi, 2020: 280). As such, any expectation of growing secularisation in the development of the modern nation state has been proven wrong in the context of modern South Korea (ibid.).

Helen Jin Kim (2022) connects the success of Protestantism and specifically Evangelism in South Korea to the propagation of Evangelism in the US in the pretext of the early Cold War Years (p. 3). Kim claims that the Evangelicals suffered a blow in an early 20th century struggle between Protestant liberalism and fundamentalism in the US. However, she also writes, against the backdrop of the Cold War and the heightened fear of communism, Evangelical missionary organisations such as World Vision started to gain headway (ibid.). Kim points to one of the reasons being that Evangelical missionaries, as staunch opponents of atheistic communism, travelled in the footsteps of the US army's foreign wars against communism and operated in countries such as South Korea with heavy US military presence (p. 9). Some Evangelicals framed the war against communism as a holy war in which they saw themselves with a divine mandate to convert as many people as possible to ward off the 'Anti-Christ' represented by North Korea (p. 13). Kim concludes that the interchangeability between the Evangelical fight for conversion and against communism was well received by the US public and gave rise to significant expansion (p. 6). According to Kim, the propagation of Evangelism in the US cannot be separated from the geopolitical pretexts of the US which in turn also connects it to the rise of Protestantism and Evangelism in South Korea during the same time (p. 14).

In a similar vein, Han (2009) demonstrates how Evangelism in South Korea came to be conflated with the US-backed fight for freedom, first from Japanese colonialism during the Pacific War and later from communism (p. 26). During Evangelical prayer rallies the 'spirit' of the freedom fight was invoked and the US military intervention was constructed as God's extended arm. In other words, 'God's will' was designated as the main reason for Korean sovereignty (p. 27). Han thus argues that the configuration of Protestantism and Evangelism in South Korea is innately linked to geopolitical interests of both South Korea and the US. As I'll demonstrate below, it is within this political and religious climate that the exercise of religious authority propelled the first transnational adoptions to take place.

Kim (2022) stresses that the expansion of Protestantism and Evangelism in South Korea is not merely a matter of US neocolonial hegemonic powers 'forcing' South Koreans to convert en masse. Nor are South Koreans to be perceived as 'free global agents' at liberty to consume whatever religion available (p. 17). Rather, Kim suggests, we should look at the success of Protestantism and Evangelism in South Korea as a result of historical processes in which 'historical subjects' have interacted with each other in transpacific exchanges of ideology, aid, allyship, and people (pp. 14-18). Here, Kim asserts, the orphan emerges as a figure of interest, as a mediator in such processes (ibid., p. 13).

Agents of Evangelism and Cold War Politics

Eleana Kim (2009) writes, citing Lisa Malkki, that children with their presumed innocence often serve as symbolic neutralisers to 'depoliticise' highly charged political contexts and adds that "[…] actual children in adoption mediated geopolitical relations between states" (p. 3, italics in the original). Below I analyse how transnational adoption, brought forward by religious motivations and interests, has shaped South Korean and US relations, focusing on the early Cold War years as those years mark the beginnings of both adop-

tions and the proliferation of South Korean/US allyship. But first I explore how Evangelicals, Bertha and Harry Holt, grew a following and motivated Americans to adopt through the production and exercise of religious authority.

Historian and sociologist of religion Soojin Chung (2021) suggests that to understand how Harry and Bertha Holt went from sponsors of children in World Vision's sponsorship programme to becoming the founders of a movement prompting thousands of Christian US families to adopt, we need to examine their so-called "founding myth". In a religious context, Chung claims, a founding myth is characterised by 'revivalist' language of life-changing moments in which 'God's foresight' or 'will' is expressed (p. 59). This is also the language Bertha Holt uses when she describes her motivation to adopt.

When Harry and Bertha Holt returned home after their meeting with World Vision the stories of the mixed-race children in South Korea kept haunting Bertha Holt (ibid.). In her memoir she details how she began to nurture a dream of bringing some of those children to their home in Oregon while she waited for her husband to share his opinion. She writes,

"On Friday, April 15th, Harry voiced the burden on his heart. […] "Every night when I go to bed, I see those pictures all over again. It doesn't make any difference where I am or what I'm doing. I think about those kids over there. I look out here at this beautiful playground God has so generously given us and something inside of me cries out at the thought of those poor little babies starving to death, or being thrown into dumps to be gnawed by rats." (ibid.: 60)."

As Bertha Holt expected, her husband had been thinking her exact thoughts. Bertha Holt describes the moment as life altering as if she had experienced an epiphany, "As I listened to Harry repeat almost word for word the very things I had told myself could be done, I realized that God was working in our hearts. Only God could bring about such a miracle." (The Adoption History Project, n.d.). Thus Bertha Holt frames their desire to adopt as God's will, a divine calling to her and her husband to save the children of South Korea. Here Bertha Holt frames her wish to adopt as inspired by the divine. Her wording is significant as Chung (2021) argues Bertha Holt's use of words like "miracle" and "dream" is characteristic for the Christian tradition of describing God's direct communication with "humanity" (p. 60). Such language use can be seen as legitimising the Holts' desire to adopt as indeed a calling brought on by divinity (ibid.). Chung elaborates that the doctrine of calling was already an ingrained part of Evangelical teachings.

By framing their mission as sacred and legitimised from the highest place, the Holts eventually gained a sizable following of ardent believers who helped them spread the word of the 'divine appointment' to adopt (p. 62). Hence, with reference to Baffelli and Caple (2019), the Holts assumed religious authority by acting as mediators, interpreters, and sense-makers of God's will.

Religious interests also played a hefty role in how the Holts conducted adoptions and exercised religious authority in practice. Notably, for several years Holt only allowed Christian Protestants, preferably Evangelicals to adopt (p. 58). Catholic or Jewish couples were referred to other adoption organisations by the Holts (Oh, 2005: 174). Likewise, Tobias Hübinette (2005) points to how the Holts exercised authority by prioritising adoptive parents' religious beliefs over parental capabilities. Couples who had been rejected by other organisations as unsuitable adopters were accepted by the Holts as long as their religious orientation aligned (p. 61). Accordingly, religion and the assumption of religious authority heavily impacted the initiation of large-scale transnational adoptions from South Korea.

In what follows, I focus on Cold War politics

to show how transnational adoption was brought forward by mutual religious and political interests across the pacific. Clarissa Oh (2012; 2005) and Eleana Kim (2009) highlight portrayals in US popular media and Christian outlets of the devastating impact of the Korean War on children in South Korea. The plight of the mixed-race children, born to US soldier fathers posted in South Korea and Korean mothers, was specifically illuminated and images of destitute war waifs dominated the media coverage (Oh, 2012: 35). Kim (2009) elaborates that as more news about the Holts' successful mission to bring back children to the US came out, more and more Christian couples began to show an interest in adopting (p. 11). Fuelled by the media-invoked images of hungry orphans and compounded by religious ardour, believers stressed both the Christian and patriotic duty to care for what were seen as half American children and encouraged the US public and government to take responsibility (Oh, 2012: 35). Oh (2005) claims that the Holts were not particularly preoccupied with patriotic commitments. To them fulfilling their assumed divine duty to save the children of Korea and place them in Christian homes was the priority (p. 174). However, as discussed above, the US experienced an Evangelical upsurge in those early Cold War years. Proponents of a certain strand of Evangelism were very much absorbed in nationalistic and patriotic concerns, specifically regarding the fight against communism (Kim, 2022: 13). Additionally, Oh (2005) contends that apart from Evangelism, a particular brand of religious patriotism, dubbed 'Christian Americanism', also gained a stronghold among the US public during those years (p. 162). Oh describes Christian Americanism as "[...] a fusion of vaguely Christian principles with values identified as particularly American" (ibid.: 162). Even though it was never a fully formulated doctrine, the idea of a conflation between Christianity and patriotism was still supported and promoted to the white, middle-class by US churches and government (ibid.). Oh asserts, that no matter

the Holts' own inclinations, they soon became the figureheads of a movement to save the children of South Korea for devout Evangelicals and supporters of Christian Americanism alike (p. 175). The US media used words such as 'crusade' and 'mission' to describe the Holts' endeavours while a US Congressman likened the Holts to the 'Biblical good Samaritan' (ibid.). I argue that by doing so the Holts were granted religious authority by key figures in the US public. The newfound authority soon intersected with political power when they, after a year of lobbying for more lenient immigration laws, saw a special 'orphan bill' that secured transnational adoption from South Korea passed in Congress in 1957 (Hübinette, 2005: 62).

On the South Korean side, state policies coincided with the newly found interest in South Korean children in the US. President Syngman Rhee worked towards national unity after the armistice agreement of the Korean War. According to Kim (2009), the mixed-race children did not fit the image of the government's ethno-nationalistic nation building programme, 'one nation, one race' (p. 12). In 1953 Syngman Rhee wrote a letter to the South Korean ambassador to the UN to stress that:

"We are most anxious to send as many of our orphans to the States as possible. In particular we desire to have adopted those children of Western fathers and Korean mothers who can never hope to make a place for themselves in Korean society. Those children should appeal to Americans more than Koreans. (ibid.: 12)."

When the Holts offered their assistance the South Koreans were already used to and relied on Christian missionaries for social welfare services. It was Christian missionaries who largely tended to the substantial needs of the children during and after the Korean War (Chung, 2020: 18; Hübinette, 2005: 2). Hence, I suggest that with the authority on welfare already in place for Christian organisations, the South Korean government read-

ily accepted the Holts as adoption operators on the basis of their religious dedication and in spite of their inadequate experience with child welfare. Thus, once again religious authority translated into practical and political power.

Apart from solving the 'problem' with the mixed-race children, the South Korean government had further motivation to establish ties with the US. Woo (2015) suggests that in the Cold War political climate in Asia, South Korea perceived themselves to be in a vulnerable position between communist North Korea and China (p. 30). Koo (2021) highlights that North Korea already taunted South Korea for letting foreigners father children and the South Korean government feared that the mixed-race children would become a political tool for North Korean advancement (p. 565). Consequently, the Rhee administration came to see transnational adoption as an opportunity to curb the North Korean ridicule and strengthen ties with the US (Woo, 2015: 30). Oh (2005) highlights how religious media in the US would portray South Koreans in refugee camps and children in orphanages as keen Christian believers, endlessly studying the bible, singing hymns, and engaging in prayers. As Oh points out, the South Koreans were configured as 'good' Christians pitted against 'evil' communism (p. 167). Against such a backdrop, adopting South Korean children could be construed as a chance to affirm Christian values while at the same time creating a bulwark against the perceived communist threat and to further US geopolitical interests in Asia (Woo, 2015: 31; Oh, 2005: 167). In that sense transnational adoption can also be seen as an alignment of religious and political values across the Pacific.

To the South Koreans the adoptions were equally valuable as a realisation of familial and ideological kinship with the US for security (Woo, 2015: 31). I discussed above how both South Korean and US Christians, bound by mutual interests, worked for the propagation of Evangelism as a bulwark against the communist threat (Han

2009; Kim 2022). Within the environment of mutual geopolitical and religious interests, transnational adoption of mixed-race children emerged as a possible practical way of furthering Evangelism. The children could serve as bridges between the countries and their conversion to Christianity would mark US empire building, enable South Korean nation building schemes, and align the two nations. In the case of transnational adoption, religious motivation to secure conversions and authority to gain a following and carry out adoptions thus intersected with political interests and power in both South Korea and the US.

Conclusion

In this essay I have explored the role of Christianity and Evangelism in the foundations of transnational adoption from South Korea during the early Cold War years. I have pointed to the rise of Evangelism in both the US and in South Korea and how those stories are connected by US militarism and mutual geopolitical interests. Borrowing from Asad's (2003) notion that religion is a space for human practice invested in power and Baffelli and Caple's (2019) understanding of religious authority, I have argued that transnational adoption was propelled by the production and exercise of religious authority in the form of a revivalist founding myth. I have also demonstrated how religious motivation and authority through transnational adoption intersected with political interests and sometimes translated into political power in the context of the Cold War.

In reality, one may argue that the first adopted children were subjected to a forced deportation of racial others, backed by religious and political support. Critical scholars across the humanities and social sciences have also documented how the Holts' calling turned into a global undertaking of ethically dubious character when the West's demand for babies quickly outgrew the actual supply. They point to how the Holts and other private operators sourced children through unethical and

illicit means such as the coercion and bribing of birth parents, local authorities, and social welfare personnel (Kim, 2015; Kim & Cho, 2014; Lee, 2022). Even to this day, joint Christian right-wing forces in the US and in South Korea still exercise religious authority to promote adoption and shape South Korean adoption policies. They shun regulatory legislation as communist, and reference 'God's will' when they advocate and enable questionable and also unlawful adoption practices (Morrison, 2021). The connection to the Holts in the early days of transnational adoption from South Korea is palpable. After all, it is the same religious zeal, hinged on the near same politics that characterise promoters of adoption today in a Korea still split at the 38th parallel.

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Book Review

The Making of a Neo-Propaganda State: China's Social Media under Xi Jinping.

Chen, Titus. Leiden: Brill. 2022. 226 pp. 978-90-04-51937-4. E-book.

BENJAMIN DAVIES

Propaganda is of paramount importance in the governance of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Its power, quantity, and variety have enticed generations of researchers. But the propaganda itself has not always been their object of study. Instead, the focus has been on analysing the policies, tools, and systems around propaganda—a trend seen in the major works of recent decades (Lynch, 1999; Brady, 2008 and 2012). However, overlooking content means that we cannot understand exactly how propaganda promotes its intended messages. Titus C. Chen's timely and welcome book, *The Making of a Neo-Propaganda State: China's Social Media under Xi Jinping*, is an attempt to do just that.

This study opens with the following question, implicitly addressing the People's Republic of China (PRC): "Why do some authoritarian governments retain popular support without directly enforcing their policy preferences on citizens?" (p. 1) Chen proceeds to answer the question over six chapters. The first three use official statements and documents to describe how reform-era developments turned the PRC into a "post-propaganda state" (p. 19); how the Xi administration has regained control; and how official media have adapted to this new control. The other three chapters comprise case studies of these latter two developments. In the case studies, Chen uses text data from WeChat posts of both official and pro-regime media to analyse homogeny in content and sentiment, propaganda as diplomatic signalling, and disinformation used against Hong Kong democracy movements.

In answering his question, Chen demonstrates something oft claimed, but rarely proven: that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) under Xi attaches great importance to propaganda, not only in wielding such "control measures" (p. 29) as censorship, but also in creating and distributing masses of content. Chen argues that it is the active propagation of pro-regime content that can lead to "bestowal of popular consent to authoritarian rule" (ibid). He shows that propagandists in the contemporary PRC have adapted by becoming "marketized", by matching "editorial policies, narrative styles, and marketing strategies as closely as possible with the taste and preferences of [their] target audiences" (p. 23), without necessarily becoming "commercialized"—that is, they remain under the direct or indirect control of the CCP. The case studies lead Chen to conclude that the CCP pursues a "market-driven, audience-friendly, and emotion-laden discursive strategy", with "framing techniques of enticement and acculturation rather than intimidation and indoctrination" (p. 180), amounting to what Chen calls "soft content" (p. 6).

This short book punches above its weight, simultaneously fitting in with the extant literature and widening the field. Chen gives due recognition to important prior research—for example, the works of Daniel C. Lynch, Anne-Marie Brady, Zhao

Yuezhi, Daniela Stockmann, Florian Schneider, and the team of Gary King, Jennifer Pan and Margaret E. Roberts—and, in the early chapters, shows that he too can provide an accomplished description of the CCP propaganda system. However, the book's greatest asset is the case studies of the later chapters. Here, Chen delivers quantitative analyses of varying complexity (the more complex including sentiment analyses, topic modelling, and tone analyses), while using clear prose and well-deployed graphs to appeal to a wide range of readers. Thus, with both accessibility and rigour, *The Making of a Neo-Propaganda State* forges new paths in the study of CCP propaganda.

The book's weaknesses are few and consist mostly of surprising oversights. Minor examples include when the case studies stop short of addressing obviously relevant matters. For example, in the chapter on online thought work as diplomatic signalling, foreign-language propaganda on PRC-external social media is not included in the analysis. However, a more striking and serious problem is that Chen gives no room for reflection on some important concepts. The term "neo-propaganda state" is left completely unexplained, and there is almost no theoretical discussion of the concept of "propaganda". Given the word's connotations, and its complicated relationship with its Chinese counterpart, xuanchuan, 宣传 this is a remarkable omission. Space could easily have been found for such discussions, which would have raised the quality of the book even further.

However, these weaknesses hardly spoil the significant achievements of *The Making of a Neo-Propaganda State*. Chen's book is a must-read for anybody interested in propaganda in the contemporary PRC. It is a pioneering work, and a contender to become a classic.

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