

Chiang Kai-shek and His Time

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The *Alter Ego* of China

Westernized Chinese Intellectuals and the Building of Chiang Kai-shek's Image in Wartime West

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Abstract Since 1927 raising a positive perception of Chiang in foreign public opinion was one of the goals of the Guomindang's propaganda machine. During the War of Resistance against Japan and the second world war the plan to project Chiang's international image as that of the predestined, capable leader of a resurgent China assumed a global dimension. Westernized Chinese intellectuals engaged in diplomatic and cultural work in China and in the West were mobilized to this end. One outcome of their efforts was the publication of some biographies of Chiang Kai-shek in foreign languages, with the aim of improving the knowledge and understanding of the Chinese leader's personality and historical role. This article puts these works in the context of Guomindang war propaganda, but also investigates how, while presenting the Generalissimo as the personification of the new modern, national identity of the Chinese Republic, they also reflected a broader cultural agenda of the Guomindang, willing to shape Western discourse on China's civilization and place in world history and culture.

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In an article entitled "Foreign views on Chiang Kai-shek" and published in the Shanghai English language magazine *The China Critic* just before the war, in 1936, Randall Gould, editor of the *Shanghai Evening Mercury Post*, wrote that "in foreign eyes, General Chiang Kai-shek at the time of his fiftieth birthday is one of the few truly great men of the world" (Gould 1936). In spite of the fact that, as has been noted, Chiang was also destined to become one of the major targets of criticism, political satire and irony in China and abroad (Taylor 2015), Gould's opinion would be echoed by several publications in the following years. Between the 1930s and the 1940s Chiang Kai-shek was increasingly presented to public opinion as one of the celebrities of world politics. China's participation in the world war brought Chiang international prominence that no Chinese leader had ever

enjoyed before. Besides Western biographies of the Generalissimo (Berkov 1938; Hedin 1939), Chiang's profile could be read in books dedicated to *Moulders of National Destinies* (Soward 1939), to *Great Soldiers of World War II* (De Weerd 1944), to *Giants of China* (Kuo 1944), and *Four Modern Statesmen* (Renyold 1944). He was compared not only to Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin, but also to great general-emperors of the past such as Napoleon and Qin Shi Huangdi, or, as did the German writer author Schaub, catalogued among the *Kämpfer für ihr Volk* alongside Mussolini and Kemal Ataturk (Schaub 1938). Most of these writings celebrated his stature as a leader, and as a symbol of a new China ready to take its place in the circle of modern, progressive nations.

Raising a positive perception of Chiang in foreign public opinion was certainly one of the goals of the Guomindang's propaganda machine, which was also engaged in building up the personality cult surrounding Chiang in China during the Nanjing decade (Taylor 2006). Nevertheless, it was during the War of Resistance against Japan and the second world war that the plan to project Chiang's international image as that of the predestined, capable leader of a resurgent China assumed a global dimension. Actually, and especially in the West, the war propaganda battlefield was quite complicated. Besides fighting the Japanese propaganda and gaining Western public opinion's support, since the early 1940s Nationalist propaganda's efforts had to face the challenge represented by some negative opinions about Chiang and the Nationalist government offered by Western writers and journalists more sympathetic with the Communist Party. In spite of their efforts, they were not able to control the flow of images, opinions and news about China's war situation in Western newspapers and magazines. Nevertheless, the Guomindang poured great energies in creating a system for international propaganda (Tsang 1980; Tong 2005; Wei 2014; Zhu 2012).

Westernized Chinese intellectuals engaged in diplomatic and cultural work in China and in the West were mobilized to this end. One outcome of their efforts was the publication of some biographies of the Chiang Kai-shek in foreign languages, with the aim of improving the knowledge and understanding of the Chinese leader's personality and historical role. This article puts these works in the context of Chinese Nationalist war propaganda, but also investigates how, while presenting the Generalissimo as the personification of the new modern, national identity of the Chinese Republic, they also reflected a wider cultural agenda of the Guomindang, willing to shape Western discourse on China's civilization and place in world history and culture.

1 Chiang Kai-shek's Official Image in the West: Dong Xianguang and His Biography of Chiang

The propaganda efforts aimed at building Chiang's legitimacy as the national leader of China in foreign eyes pre-dated the war. It was actually connected to the creation of Chiang's *public persona* through written, visual and aural media. This was a gradual, complex process which started in the 1920s, by the desire of the leader himself (Taylor 2006, 2015). Chiang was well aware of the importance of his public image. He actually promoted the collection and the editing of records concerning his deeds and words, to produce the *Shilüe gaoben* (Huang 2010) for future historians. Collections of Chiang's speeches and political writings, autobiographical accounts, written by ghost-writers, Chiang's personal secretary Chen Bulei for instance, were also produced. The whole process of building up his public image tapped several cultural resources deeply rooted in Chinese Confucian and popular culture but nonetheless relevant to the emerging modern nationalist imaginary in twentieth-century China, such as the traditional moral concept of "enduring humiliation" (*chiku*), the stoic ability to face difficulties in preparation for future victory (Huang 2011).

Narratives of Chiang's life also played an important role in Chiang's legitimization as a leader, making him an inspirational model for modern Chinese identity. Biographical accounts of Chiang served to publicly acknowledge him as a leader of pure revolutionary pedigree, the true heir of Sun Yat-sen, and to promote him as an object of veneration for the Chinese people for his moral, military and political qualities.

The pattern of this narrative was set in the first biography of Chiang in Chinese, published as early as 1927. Written by Qin Shou'ou, a playwright belonging to the school of Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies, it celebrated Chiang's military and moral qualities (Qin 1927). The tale of Chiang's life, from infancy to the end of the Northern Expedition, is actually constructed following the model type of the "rebel-reformer", also important in the traditional historiography but that acquired a new prominence in the revolutionary era (Wang 1990). As with Sun Yat-sen, the rise of nationalism gave new meaning to this traditional type of hero, a personality who breaks the rules in order to guide a positive change for his people. Offering a portrait of Chiang's life as that of a revolutionary hero but also a reformer, this narrative aimed to enhance Chiang's legitimization as a leader China along the path established by Sun.

This pattern was destined to become the model for the narratives of Chiang Kai-shek's life in foreign languages produced by the Guomindang's intellectuals to the benefit of foreign public opinion. In fact, just before the war, the effort targeted at foreign public opinion to strengthen Chiang's fame abroad became more systematic and the first official biography of Chiang in English was produced by a well-known Nationalist propaganda

intellectual, Dong Xianguang. His work, titled *Chiang Kai-shek. Soldier and Statesman* appeared in Shanghai in 1937, and later revised and re-published in Taiwan (Tong 1937).

Dong Xianguang, who was known in the West as Hollington K. Tong, played a key role in creating first an informal network and later a propaganda structure. He came from a Christian family and graduated in journalism from the University of Missouri and Columbia University. In the early twentieth-century he taught English to Chiang Kai-shek at the Longjing High School of Fenghua. Dong had been the editor of the English language newspaper the *China Press* (MacKinnon 2008) and later, in 1935, he was chosen to work in the supervision of foreign cable news in Shanghai. In 1937 he was appointed a Vice-Minister of Information, in charge of the Department of International Propaganda (Tong 2005; Wei 2014).

Thanks to his professional training abroad and his experience as an editor of an English language newspaper, Dong was well acquainted with the *milieu* of foreign correspondents in China and consequently able to gain the support and cooperation of Western journalists to address foreign public opinion during the war.

Dong's knowledge of the Western media culture was certainly useful to his work as Chiang Kai-shek's chief English language propagandist. He presented himself as someone who had access to a great lot of information, but, though his biography of Chiang was evidently a laudatory work, he pretended that it respected Western norms of objectivity. In the preface, Dong is lavish with eulogistic adjectives and expressions such as "the greatest soldier-statesman of our time on the continent of Asia", the "Builder of New China, who has successfully evolved order out of chaos" (Tong 1953, xiii). But, for it addressed a Western audience, it also aimed to reflect the author's adherence to professional criteria of objectivity and scientific approach to his subject that he thought would strongly increase the credibility of his biography in Western eyes.

In spite of his official role and personal connection to Chiang, Dong pretended that his work on Chiang was the outcome of his spontaneous admiration for the leader. He affirms that he first had the idea to write such a biography when he was spending some time with Chiang in Xikou in early 1930. There he began to better understand the greatness of the man. During this trip, he decided that someday he would write a biography of the Nationalist leader, since:

Even in those days it had already become clear that no Chinese in this generation would rise to such heights of greatness as the Generalissimo. Specially during the following six years his life was so full of movement that it would be a national loss if it were not accurately recorded and properly interpreted. Hence the author's present undertaking.

Aware of the value of self-revelation, the author has, wherever possible, let the Generalissimo reveal himself in his speeches and writings and in his actions. Realizing that, in many instances, by summarizing, much of the essence of the original would be lost, many of the speeches and written appeals to the nation have been given in full. In brief the author has humbly followed in the steps of Boswell instead of attempting to emulate the brilliant biographers who are the present – perhaps passing – vogue. Though only a pedestrian performance, this biography claims to be truthful – some may think unnecessarily truthful. (Tong 1953, xvi-xvii)

As an official biography Dong chose to reproduce *verbatim*, as much as possible, the words of the Generalissimo. According to him, this proved necessary in order to dispel the rumours and gossip which surrounded the leader's personal history. The true nature of the man was simply buried in his own deeds and his words. But, in order to be more persuasive he chose to dedicate more space to the impressions and ideas of Chiang offered by foreigners themselves, making use of these sources to build an image of a national leader which could be convincing in Western eyes.

In many cases stress has been laid upon the reaction to the Generalissimo's policy and personality by foreign correspondents in China and other foreigners. This was deliberate. In the nature of things articulate Chinese are either pro- or anti-Chiang. The foreigner is able to take a detached and objective view of matters which are of vital personal concern to the Chinese, and regarding which the Chinese could hardly be expected to be entirely free from partiality or prejudices. (Tong 1953, xvii)

Dong's biography concentrates mainly on Chiang's career as a military and political leader. Being an authorized and official source as regards the leader's life and thoughts, consistently with Chiang's aspiration to act and to be considered as a "Confucian scholar-soldier" (Taylor 2009, 38), Dong's main concern was to persuade the Western reader that Chiang was the product of the best of China's tradition, but also that as a leader he was different from the stereotypical Asian despot. Dong Xianguang's Chiang was physically and psychologically strong, never ambiguous in his speech and thought, never opportunistic and completely trustworthy. He embodied a new kind of Chinaman, who could meet the expectations of Westerners. But his personality was, at any rate, deeply rooted in the great moral and spiritual tradition of Chinese civilization. Chiang's main features were actually his strong will, self-discipline and perseverance. His leadership was that of "a man fitted by nature and training successfully to guide the Chinese people to a happier and fuller life" (Tong 1953, xx), but Chiang's life was that of a 'self-made' leader, who had acquired that position for his merits and capacities in politics and war:

Chiang devoted a score of years to training himself for the role of leadership. He had hardened his body, and had schooled himself to endurance. He had gained not only book knowledge, but the knowledge of practical military and political affairs that had enabled him to graduate with honors from the University of Experience. (Tong 1953, xvi)

His leadership and strong personality were not surprising considering the roots of his moral qualities and his greatness. Dong informed the readers that “the key to much that is obscured in the development of Chiang’s powerful character is revealed by an understanding of: 1) his family influence, 2) the historical setting of his time of birth and, 3), his early topographical surroundings” (Tong 1953, 2; on the importance of his provincial origins in analysis of Chiang see Taylor, Huang 2012, 103). It was within his family and native community that his basic moral values – such as total commitment to the public good – had been preserved and learnt. Dong emphasized that most of Chiang’s political actions were just the reflection of his adherence to a set of values channelled in the pursuit of the public good, and not of personal power. Even political and military defeats provided occasion to show this commitment. Dong dedicates several pages to Chiang’s temporary retreat from the political scene after the Shanghai repression in 1927, when he moved to a Buddhist temple in Xikou. The biographer explains that this was a chance for the Generalissimo to show how he was always motivated by the highest dedication to the public interest.

Why Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, at the seeming apex of his military career, accepted retirement so submissively will seem inexplicable to many readers. Throughout his career, Chiang has always been willing to eliminate himself when others felt he had become an obstacle to unity. (Tong 1953, 92)

In order to justify this interpretation, Dong recalls the impressions of foreign journalists who went to interview Chiang and discovered an inspired, sober and strong leader for China and not a power-hungry militarist.

Attired in a long grey gown, he might well have been a monk in this setting, but his steady eyes and stern, clear-cut features, and his erect military bearing, indicated the soldier he is. (Tong 1953, 96)

His words were never vague and one could not help but feel that his mind worked fast and clearly. Here indeed has a strong character, a leader of the type that China needs so badly; and one could not doubt his sincerity. (Tong 1953, 98)

According to Dong Xiangyang, even Chiang's conversion to Christianity was first of all an example of the high moral qualities and strength of his personality. What counted was that, in the practice of his Christian faith, Chiang showed the same serious attitude he possessed in the political and military field.

It was characteristic of Chiang in deciding to become a Christian, he was to follow the act by whole-hearted consecration to his new creed. To Chiang, Christianity has been an inspiration which he has carried devoutly into his daily life. After entering the Christian faith he set aside inviolably a portion of each day which he devotes to solitary prayers and devotions. Not even the most urgent State business has permitted to interrupt him doing his prayer period. To Chiang, Christianity has been not a thing of rituals, but a deep personal experience. Although he was to be the ruler of a largely non-Christian nation, he has never permitted opportunistic considerations to silence his public participation in Christian activities, nor his public avowals of his religion. (Tong 1953, 104)

Dong's biography of Chiang was explicitly a mirror of the leader's self-representation on the public stage. As a product of a man of the Guomindang's propaganda apparatus, this official portrait was evidently consistent with the message Chiang himself aspired to convey to the international public opinion: Chiang was a trustworthy leader, deserving respect, admiration and political support, able to think and act for his people's sake. Moreover he was able to guide the Chinese to develop those virtues – such as self-discipline and endurance – which lay at the very heart of his rise as the Chinese national military and political leader, but which were also fundamental for creating a rejuvenated and strong China. These virtues were rooted in Chinese tradition, which was consistent with the goal of modernization and were the foundation of Chinese national identity.

This official work, which transformed a "soldier" in a political leader and a moral guide for all the Chinese nation, was further elaborated in some biographies of Chiang Kai-shek written by Westernized Chinese intellectuals abroad.

These biographies were based on official sources and did not contravene the directives of Nationalist official propaganda, as they were also connected to the Nationalist diplomatic networks. Nevertheless, though their authors shared the same goal of Dong's biography, they conceived their mission as that of 'cultural brokers' between China and the West. The portrait of the leader they built served to celebrate Chiang, but it also revealed their own aspiration to shape the cultural identity of their country in the global discourse about China.

2 The Sustaining Power of the Past: Zhang Xinhai's *Asia's Man of Destiny*

Exploring the moral and cultural dimensions of Chiang's personality and life and elevating him to the "epitome of his race" (Chang 1944, x) was the fundamental concern of the biography written by Zhang Xinhai (Chang Hsin-Hai) and published in New York in 1944 under the title *Chiang Kai-shek. Asia's Man of Destiny*.

Zhang was a Westernized intellectual, whose career concerns lay mostly in Nationalist bureaucracy for foreign relations. Zhang had studied in Shanghai and later obtained a Ph.D. in English Literature from Harvard in 1922. As one of the founders of the liberal magazine *The China Critic*, he was close to famous liberal cosmopolitan intellectuals like Lin Yutang (Sima 2012). But from the early 1920s, he became involved in diplomacy, though he also taught English Literature at Beijing University. In 1928, he accepted a post for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs serving in Portugal and Poland as Ambassador. He was back in Nanjing in 1933, where he taught English literature. In 1942 he was sent to the United States to contribute to Chinese cultural diplomacy efforts during the war. Actually, he was Song Ziwen's man, Song being at that time Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the Chinese Embassy in Washington (Wu 1993).

Zhang's biography of Chiang seems to have enjoyed quite a large circulation, since it was translated into German in 1945 in Zurich, in French in 1946 and - with a different title - in Danish in 1947. As the author explains in his long introduction, it sprang from the decision to satisfy the several requests received from foreign friends upon his arrival in the United States. There Zhang had realized that "in spite of the many channels of information which were open to the American public, the understanding of China and things Chinese was both limited and quite often inaccurate" (Chang 1944, i). There was great curiosity surrounding China and especially regarding Chiang Kai-shek, but, as Zhang emphasized, "only one of Chiang Kai-shek's own countrymen, who was at the same time familiar with the West and its literature and history, should undertake the task" (ix) of satisfying their curiosity. As foreign friends reminded him that "Surely it should be your duty to bring us and the Western world nearer to him and him to us" (ix), Zhang had decided to study the subject and write a book about Chiang Kai-shek.

Hoping to bridge the gap between the West and China's leader, and at the same to project a positive image of China to educated American public opinion, Zhang also wanted his work to have a literary value, taking as his model the English biographer, Lytton Strachey. Actually, Zhang's goals were greater than just to offer a narrative of the main events in the Generalissimo's life. He wanted to provide the reader with an erudite, yet readable introduction to the links binding Chiang, Chinese civilization and

Sun Yat-sen, presenting Chiang as the champion of Chinese traditional virtues and the finest interpreter of Chinese nationalism and modern transformation. In his biography, therefore, are long digressions into Chinese history from the Opium Wars, the unequal treaties and especially Sun Yat-sen and his ideas.

Aware of the relevance that the ideal of “democracy” could have in the American readership’s eyes, Zhang described Chiang as the only leader capable of putting into practice Sun Yat-sen’s political thought and plans, building a “social democracy in which constitutional powers will, accordingly to old Chinese conceptions, reside in the people and thereby create a perfect State” (Chang 1944, 143). This perfect State was inherently democratic, since, as Zhang argues, democracy was ever the essence of Chinese political thought from antiquity. Drawing upon from Sun’s teachings, Chiang was driving his people towards a future of progress and democracy based on the spiritual legacy of ancient Chinese tradition. This was the newest and greatest contribution of the man, and an intellectual and political challenge of global relevance.

Aspiring to make of Chiang’s life an exemplary tale of Chinese virtues, Zhang divides his narrative into three parts evoking fundamental Chinese values: “Devotion”, Chiang’s infancy and youth, “Loyalty”, Chiang’s experience in the Republican and Nationalist revolutions, and lastly, “Fulfillment”, Chiang’s history and role after the establishment of the Nanjing government.

So, the first part is aimed at showing how the young orphan Chiang was respectful and devoted to family traditional values, under the enlightened guide of his mother and his grandfather, studied and worked hard to succeed and began to nourish patriotic feelings inspired by national military and patriotic heroes such as Yue Fei.

The second part is mainly dedicated to Sun Yat-sen and to the faith that Chiang held in the father of the nation, shown in his participating in the revolution and defending Sun from the Guangdong militarist Chen Jiuming. Demonstrating his military and political capacities and his loyalty to the Chinese nation during the Northern Expedition, Chiang fought the Communists in 1927 to preserve the success of the national revolution.

The third part of the biography is dedicated to Chiang’s role as the leader of China during the Nanjing decade, to his plans for national regeneration - from the New Life Movement to National Reconstruction - up to the Xi’an incident and his role during the War of Resistance and further, to the Cairo Conference in 1943. Chiang is portrayed as a strong leader wanting to restore order to Chinese society and culture, building its material and spiritual progress on the basis of the revival of the same ancient virtues which inspired his own life. China, in Zhang’s view, was at that time in a state of confusion where “ancient and modern, Chinese and foreign customs were hopelessly mixed up” (229), a problem that Chiang aspired to solve.

One of the main topics addressed by Zhang in his depiction of Chiang is the relationship between Chinese civilization and the world on the one side and the connection between Chinese tradition and modernity on the other. The author's main concern is to demonstrate how China, in order to become modern, should not betray its traditional identity. The greatness of Chiang was to have understood this truth and put it into practice:

To the student of sociology and history, the interesting question is whether it is possible to create a new and progressive society that can withstand the strain of modern conditions on the basis of values that are an inalienable part of a society that was so radically different in structure. It is Chiang Kai-shek's belief that they are compatible. And I think that he has thus, either consciously or unconsciously, grasped the secret of China's long and vigorous history. The secret is in China's ability to absorb the new into the matrix of the old. The principle of continuity has ever been the most vital principle in the history of China. (Chang 1944, 9)

Zhang supports his argument explaining, for example, the symbolic meaning of several of Chiang's actions from an historical and cultural perspective, though without overlooking the new elements in his style of government. One example is his description of the presidential couple's trip in the Western regions in 1935:

There was little rest for the couple during this extended tour of the historic provinces from which Chinese culture had arisen and which seemed so neglected. Without an airplane such a journey would have been impossible. It was the first time in the history of China that a ruler and his consort had covered so large an area of the land over which they ruled. It was nevertheless done in the best historic tradition. Chinese rulers from the earliest times felt the need of national itineraries in order personally to learn the condition of the people and to seek the means of improving their lot.

The journey was indeed a historic performance. It had its effect in two ways. The people of China had heard a great deal about the country's leading man, and how they had made his personal acquaintance. At the same time it had brought unity between the different sections of the country, something that had not been entirely done before. But more than that, the journey symbolized the direction of China's future development and expansion. China's growth had historically been from north to south, from west to east. Chiang, in this journey, indicated his intense interest and preoccupation with the development of the country from east to west. (237-8)

The historic importance of the Western regions, the cradle of Chinese civilization, for the future of the country was not ignored by a leader so aware of the weight of tradition. Moreover "it was from these capitals also that the initiative for an intercourse of cultures was made". If China was historically open to foreign cultures and exchanges, the virtues which had shaped and guided traditional Chinese society were nonetheless fundamental to point modern leaders like Sun and Chiang along the right political path:

The moral development must begin with the word *xiao*, devotion to one's parents. That was why Sun Yat-sen impressed upon his countrymen that the truth of Chinese civilization had its own foundation to stand upon, that it was imperative that there should be no imitation of Western superficialities, especially with regard to the worship of might as the guiding principle of national and international life. (241)

A full portrait of Chiang as an embodiment of this China open to the world but firmly and confidently anchored in its own tradition and values is offered by Zhang in a chapter called "The Sustainable Power of the Past". As a leader of China, Chiang could not simply be understood according to Western standards, but should be appreciated by understanding his debt to the great civilization of which he was the current best expression.

It is only logical that people in Europe and America should judge Chiang Kai-shek according to the standards which they themselves know best, but any attempt to do so will not result in a complete understanding of the man. He is completely friendly to foreign visitors and his mind is receptive to all constructive ideas wherever they come from. In fact he keeps a secretarial staff busy bringing him information about new books and publications about which he desires to know something. But the fact remains that Chiang's whole background and training are so thoroughly Chinese, and he draws so heavily on Chinese learning and scholarship that it is impossible to conceive him apart from this Chinese milieu. (220)

This because:

No great leader in Chinese history can have a permanent influence on his people without himself being an example of virtues and qualities which are traditionally considered by the Chinese as being indispensable to such a person. (220)

Zhang informs the reader that, even if Chiang was a military man, his thoughts and actions were mostly inspired by the Chinese classics he read, and by the examples of the philosopher Wang Yangming and the great Qing statesman Zeng Guofan. His strength depended on his spiritual resources.

As a traditional scholar, Chiang paid utmost attention to moral self-scrutiny following the example of Confucius. Moreover, he practiced meditation according to Buddhist teaching in order to purify his mind. Finally, he had become Christian to enlarge his spiritual foundation. Zhang argues that Chiang's conversion to Christianity was not a refusal or a relinquishment of Chinese tradition, but rather an expansion of Chiang's spirit. He attempts to make of Chiang the symbol of a China naturally ready to accept foreign cultural imports without by this weakening her identity. Chiang personified a China even more cosmopolitan than the West.

Chiang Kai-shek's spiritual foundation will forever remain in the greatness of China's historical past. His belief in Christianity is no conversion; it is enlargement, development, and expansion. If, conversely, Christians are also willing to regard Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism in the spirit for a dispassionate search of truth, then we are on the way to a real universal brotherhood of men for which we have been groping but have failed to reach. We are too much confined to institutions, which are not an essential part of the spirit and become therefore circumscribed in our outlook. But the true life of the spirit is full and all-embracing and welcomes other kindred truths. Chiang Kai-shek's life is a demonstration of this eternal principle. (223)

This feature of Chinese culture, according to Zhang, had important political consequences. Chiang's leadership demonstrated that the greatest contribution China could make to the world could be the importance of moral law in the behaviour not only of men, but also of nations. Chiang embodied the identity of China in the world, that of a civilization whose essence was spiritual and moral, and for these reasons truly cosmopolitan.

Reflecting the cultural nationalism of its author, a Westernized Chinese intellectual conscripted into the service of government propaganda, Zhang's book portrays Chiang's rise first to the national and then to the international scene as the projection of Chinese tradition onto the world stage. But he strives to persuade readers that this tradition was open and cosmopolitan, attempting to universalise its core values. His main concern was to make Chiang's 'Chineseness' the embodiment of the global ideals of progress and democracy adapted to the national context. Thanks to Chiang, the author suggests, finally Chinese tradition could find the place it deserved in the international world as a lively and worthy source of values and ideas. "It is Chiang's task, thus, to create a new and better China and, through China, a new and better world" (Chang 1944, 9).

3 Chiang and His China in the Works of Xie Shoukang and Lin Qiusheng

The global ambitions of Nationalist propaganda nourished the appearance of works on Chiang Kai-shek in several other Western languages. Continental Europe's public opinion was actually considered just as important as the English-speaking world's for Chinese international communication strategy, and some works on Chiang Kai-shek were published in French and in German by Chinese intellectuals working in Europe.

The first biography of Chiang published in Europe was written in French by Xie Shoukang (Sie Cheou Kang). Xie was another Western-educated intellectual employed in diplomacy by the Nationalist government's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and especially in cultural diplomacy during the war. As a government student, Xie had studied political science in France and Belgium, and in 1923 received a Ph.D. in Economics from the Free University of Brussels. He was active in the political organizations of Chinese students in Europe in 1920, and back in China in 1929 he became Director of the Literature Department of the National Central University in Nanjing, before being sent to the Chinese Embassy in Belgium. His career in foreign affairs developed in Europe until, in 1941, he was appointed first Chinese ambassador to the Holy See, a position he was able to cover only in 1943.

Xie was actually a Chinese intellectual astride two worlds. His expertise in French language and literature awarded him membership of the Belgian Royal Academy of French Language and Literature in 1946. Author of several theatrical works and essays in French, and a well-known painter, Xie actually contributed with his literary and artistic skills to Nationalist propaganda in Europe publishing, in Brussels in 1941, *Le Maréchal Chiang Kai-shek. Son enfance, sa jeunesse* (Tang 2013). A second edition was printed in Switzerland, Berne 1943, and a third in Paris after the end of the war, in 1946. The book was finally translated into English in Taipei in 1954.

Like Zhang Xinhai, Xie committed himself to act as a bridge between China and the West in the intellectual and cultural realms. In his introduction, Xie quoted the Latin translation of a text by Mencius and made reference to Plutarch to explain how a universal law in History held that the history of a great people was always characterized by the difficulties and problems they had to overcome from the youngest age in order to strengthen their nature and rise to glory. The key factors in the life of the protagonists of History were to be traced in their childhood and youth. Consequently, the secrets of Chiang Kai-shek's greatness were buried in facts not known to everybody, in those early years the West was unaware of. With this book, Xie wished to fill that vacuum of knowledge, making clear how Chiang's personality and leadership had developed from his experience as a child and a young man in China and that these traits were deeply rooted in Chinese tradition and culture. In the preface to the third

edition in 1946, Count Carlo Sforza, Italian Minister in China in the first decade of the 1900s, and also Minister of Foreign Affairs after the fall of Fascism in Italy, seems to have understood the spirit of Xie's book.

Sie explained Chiang, because he has intinctly [*sic*] felt, as a true Chinese, that a man is what his family, his surroundings and his ancestors [*sic*] have made him. That is why these pages show us Chiang Kai-shek such as he is and not otherwise. (Sie 1946, iv)

Actually, as Xie himself acknowledges, the main source for his narrative was an official one: the twenty volumes of the records from Chiang's diary edited by Mao Sicheng in 1937 with the title *Minguo shiwunian yiqian de Chiang Kai-shek xiansheng* (Chiang Kai-shek before 1936). The content of these published records was revised by Chiang himself before publication, and they became the standard source for biographies of Chiang's early life. Xie claims he received Mao's work from Chiang's personal secretary, Chen Bulei. Though this act suggests that Xie's decision to write a biography of the Generalissimo was akin to an official assignment, Xie affirms in the introduction that the idea of writing it had come to him as early as 1931, when he had the chance to meet Chiang personally.

Xie provides the readers with a long, vivid narrative, in which all chapters are introduced by proverbs or aphorisms which summarize the basic meaning of each section. Long dialogues between the protagonists hint at the author's interest for the theatre. On the whole, Chiang's personal history is again presented as deeply embedded in Chinese civilization. In the first chapter, Xie starts his narrative by tracing the origins of the Chiangs to the early era of Chinese history. Chiang's ancestors were descended from Bailing, the third son of the Duke of Zhou, who established Chiang's estate in Henan. Over the centuries they moved South, producing Buddhist doctrines in the Middle Ages and scholars from the Song Dynasty on (4). Later, a branch moved to Xikou and from that branch, which in time developed and increased in number, the Generalissimo was born. Orphaned as a child, he owed his moral education to his grandfather and his mother, an education inspired by Buddhist and Confucian values. Following their teachings and examples, the young Chiang was slowly inspired by the old masters, demonstrating from an early age his courage, concentration, strong will and respect for Chinese culture.

His qualities as a young man were discovered and appreciated by all the masters Chiang Kai-shek met. They guided him in the study of great Confucian Statesmen such as Zeng Guofan, but also in the discovery of the revolutionary ideals of Sun, which directed Chiang's patriotic spirit towards personal engagement in political action. Breaking with the social conventions of his birth-place, all these meetings and events prompted him to become a military man in order to save the Chinese nation from

the dramatic crisis it had been thrown into by the Manchus and foreign imperialism, but whose deep cause he soon discovered lay in the weakness of its leaders and people.

In Xie's narrative, two main figures shaped the development of Chiang's personality and rise to power. The first was Chiang's mother, whose support for her gifted child never wavered, resisting all social pressures, and above all, instilling in him the spiritual values of self-discipline and public ethics which made him become a great leader. The second was Chen Qimei, who spurred and guided Chiang to become a loyal revolutionary and follower of Sun Yat-sen. The book was actually dedicated to one of Chen's nephews, Lifu, the powerful head of the CC clique. More than Sun himself, it is Chen Qimei who figures strongly in the account of Chiang's participation in the revolutionary movement.

Devotion to his mother and to his mentor, Chen, are the fundamental quality of Chiang's personality that Xie Shoukang chose to highlight and that, according to him, was at the same time the very essence of Chiang's 'Chineseness'. Chiang's greatest ability was his capacity to reconcile his duties towards the family, and especially his mother, and his duty towards the nation. The affection he nourished towards her was the same as the affection he felt for the motherland. He was a good son of China because he was a good son for his mother Wang. When his mother died, he could channel all his devotion into the nation with the same spirit that had motivated his filial attitude towards his mother. In the same vein, Xie describes Chiang as an affectionate and caring father to his two sons Jingguo and Weiguo, the suggestion being that he could well become a good father for all his compatriots.

Besides the centrality attributed to Chiang Kai-shek's family values and personal relations as the source of his civic values, Xie describes the Generalissimo as a scholar, placing great emphasis on his fondness for philosophy and poetry, quoting verses Chiang had composed in significant moments in his life and explaining how the thought of Neoconfucian philosophers like Wang Yanming shaped Chiang's attitude towards life. Chiang's revolution was mainly the restoration of Chinese values, and a strong sense of continuity with the past was the greatest source of his legitimacy as the leader of Chinese nation.

A similar argument was developed in the biography of Chiang written in German by Li Qiusheng, a Chinese intellectual which played a key-role in the relationships between Nationalist China and Germany. The efforts Nationalists channelled towards German public opinion during the war were a complex enterprise which actually reflected the complicated relationship between the two countries during these years (Leutner 1998; Glang 2014). When the war froze relations between Germany and China, Lin strove to maintain the cultural relations between the two countries. Lin Qiusheng had studied Germany, and in the 1930s acted as one of the

most important informers regarding German affairs for Chiang Kai-shek and his entourage. He was a lecturer at Berlin University and Guomindang activist, member of the Chinese Supreme National Defence Council (Liang 1978, Leutner 1998). Besides his role as a political link between pro-China elements in German political and military milieux and Chiang Kai-shek, Lin was the founder of a Chinese propaganda paper in Berlin, the *China Post*, which he hoped could balance what he perceived as negative information about China in Germany. Moreover, from the late 1930s, he wrote several academic works about Chinese traditional culture in German. Though Lin stayed in Berlin until 1941, in 1938 the Chinesische Kultur-Dienst (China Cultural Service), an institute founded by Lin as a tool of cultural diplomacy in Berlin, moved to Zurich. The declared goal of the Institute was to improve knowledge of Chinese culture without any political affiliation, and, during the war, it published several works in German concerning Chinese traditional culture, art and philosophy. Not surprisingly, considering the cultural agenda of the Guomindang's propaganda abroad, political essays on Chiang and translations of Chiang's works were also published by the institute. In 1936 Lin had already published the German translation of Chiang Kai-shek's *China's Unification and Reconstruction*. While in Zurich in 1943 Lin published a short essay under the title *Chiang Kai-shek. Erneurer und Einiger Chinas. Eine Skizze* (Chiang Kai-shek. Renovator and Unifier of China). As the author wrote on the first page, the book had been written for the "sixth anniversary of the Japanese aggression on China" and it was mainly dedicated to explaining what were, according to the author, the key factors of Chiang Kai-shek's leadership and vision which supported Nationalist China's military capacity to resist Japanese aggression.

More than Chiang's life and personality, or history as a revolutionary leader, Lin wanted to highlight Chiang's philosophy of the State and his belonging to the great Chinese political and philosophical tradition. He explains to his readers that Chiang had been able to unite and revive Chinese traditional ethics being on the one hand similar to Qin Shi Huangdi, as a great military chief and unifier of China, and on the other, inspiring himself with the teaching of Confucius, the master who did not create but transmitted the teachings of the old Sages of Antiquity. In Lin's perspective, Chiang embodied the two most important original Chinese State philosophies, the Legalist and the Confucian, which had been the basis of China's past greatness.

This was China's peculiar and intellectually independent path to emerging national strength:

The new form of government and its creator Chiang Kai-shek because of their simplicity and naturalness could seem not sufficient in the eyes of many Europeans. But in the immense force attached in these simple

teaching words, you will find the keys for understanding the renewal of China and its emerging form of government. The key can be found in Sun Yat-sen's words: "China depends on its own path and can imitate neither the Western conception of life nor the Western idea of power. (Lin 1943, 41)

Chiang was the embodiment of the true spirit of the Chinese State, a State which was built first on the Confucian ethos, whose values had also been at the root of Chinese military capacity to resist Japanese aggression, a capacity which depended on the unity of the nation. The revival of ancient values had been the basis for the mobilization of all the officers and people for the sake of the nation and therein lay the strength of Chiang's leadership.

We can see that what the greatest part of Chiang Kai-shek's construction and renewal achieved has been the return of the ancient Chinese ethos in everyday life, the restoration of loyalty, righteousness and concord among the people, as is represented by the promulgation of the New Life Movement. Without it, all the bravery and fearlessness would have been vain. (Lin 1943, 45)

All in Lin's pamphlet, from the reproduction of Chiang's calligraphy, to the few pictures portraying Chiang dressed as an old Confucian scholar, contributed to evoking the image of the Generalissimo as an embodiment of Chinese values and culture. Chiang's power was not that of a revolutionary but of a renovator along the path of his ancestors, a reformer able to drive his people to discover again the source of their identity and strength. Moreover he was obviously a Statesman, since he was fighting to create a strong and unified State, the only dimension within which the Chinese, as individuals and a community, could fully achieve the moral standards worthy of their glorious past. According to Lin, this had to be recognized as sufficient basis for Chiang's legitimization as a leader able to project again the greatness of the Chinese past onto its future.

4 Concluding Remarks

In the propaganda war which China fought during the resistance war and the second world war, the *persona* of Chiang Kai-shek played a fundamental role. In the domestic and international contexts as well, the Chinese leader was depicted as the personification of the Chinese people's capacity to resist foreign aggression and fight for their own freedom against foreign imperialism. Nationalist China aspired to carve out a space in a media landscape dominated by Western media and to speak with its own voice,

working to increase its ability to play a part on the world stage, taking part in the translational debate about the war and especially defining the place of China and its leader in the world that war was shaping.

Westernized Chinese intellectuals working for Chiang's diplomacy were called to play a fundamental role in this scenario to achieve this aim. As the examples illustrated in this article show, the call was effective.

Each of the authors and works considered in this article had received a foreign education at the highest level, in the United States and in Europe, and were modern cosmopolitan intellectuals well-versed in foreign cultures, literature and society. Nevertheless, they did not hesitate to place their skills at the service not only of the Republic of China but of the celebration of the leader himself.

As a matter of fact, the works of these writers were essentially an amplification of the discourse already developed by the Chinese domestic propaganda apparatus aimed at legitimizing Chiang as the central leader of China. The image of Chiang offered by these writers was, consistently with the aspiration of Chiang himself, that of, together, a military leader and a modern Statesman, but also a Confucian scholar, a devoted son, a loyal comrade, a good husband and father for his sons and all the Chinese citizens.

But insofar as they addressed foreign public opinion, these portraits had a greater objective. They all wanted first of all to persuade readers of Chiang Kai-shek's 'Chineseness', not only reversing the perception of their country as a weak, corrupt and divided country, but rather suggesting that modern China's cultural identity and political present and future were rooted in the past and had to be understood on its own terms. The recounting of Chiang's life had to sum up all Chinese native philosophical and moral tradition, but also reflect a new Chinese cosmopolitanism and openness to the world. Wrapped up in Chiang's *persona*, the contradictions between Chinese tradition and modernity which had dominated political and intellectual dynamics since the nineteenth century were to be seen as finally solved.

In this perspective, the leader's life and personality were made a means to at last project modern Chinese cultural nationalism onto the global scene. Actually, these biographies were not only hagiographies of the leader; they were the reflection of Guomindang's attempt to affirm China's importance in the world from a cultural point of view. Emphasizing the cultural genealogy of the Chinese leader and his being the embodiment of the highest values of Chinese - and Asian - civilization, they were aimed at reversing what they perceived as a marginalization of Chinese tradition in political and cultural global imaginary.

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