

# H-Diplo

## H-Diplo Article Reviews

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No. 294

Published on 23 March 2011

H-Diplo Article Review Editors: Tom Maddux and Diane N. Labrosse

Web and Production Editors: George Fujii and John Vurpillat

Commissioned for H-Diplo by Thomas Maddux

**Grace Ai-Ling Chou. 'Cultural Education as Containment of Communism: The Ambivalent Position of American NGOs in Hong Kong in the 1950s.'** *Journal of Cold War Studies* 12: 2 (Spring 2010): 3-28. DOI: 10.1162/jcws.2010.12.2.3. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1162/jcws.2010.12.2.3> .

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/reviews/PDF/AR294.pdf>

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The Cold War was a total war that had to be waged on all fronts – diplomatic, military, economic, and cultural – and required the participation of as many actors as possible – diplomats, soldiers, volunteers, film-makers, publishers, and so forth. With the 'cultural turn' in diplomatic/international history, the cultural dimensions of the Cold War have become a flourishing field in the past two decades. While most scholars focused on Europe, the cultural Cold War in Asia has recently seen a number of major publications.<sup>1</sup> In her article, Grace Ai-Ling Chou contributes to the scholarship on the cultural Cold War between Communist China and the United States from the perspective of higher education in Hong Kong. Specifically, she examines how the three major American non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – the Yale-China Association, the Asia Foundation, and the Ford Foundation – promoted cultural education in 1950s Hong Kong by financing and supporting New Asia, a post-secondary college founded by

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<sup>1</sup> Charles K. Armstrong, 'The Cultural Cold War in Korea, 1945-1950', *Journal of Asian Studies* 62: 1 (February 2003): 71-99; Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Patrick Major and Rana Mitter, 'East is East and West is West? Towards a Comparative Socio-Cultural History of the Cold War', in Rana Mitter and Patrick Major (eds.), *Across the Bloc: Cold War Cultural and Social History* (London: Frank Cass, 2004), pp. 1-22; Robert Edwin Herzstein, *Henry R. Luce, Time, and the American Crusade in Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Tuong Vu and Wasana Wongsurawat (eds.), *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia: Ideology, Identity, and Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Zheng Yangwen, Hong Liu, and Michael Szonyi (eds.), *The Cold War in Asia: The Battle for Hearts and Minds* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

anti-communist intellectuals from the mainland. Drawing on the archives of the three NGOs as well as the secondary literature on Hong Kong and Cold War history, Chou makes the clear and powerful argument that given 'the ambiguity and ambivalence in the thinking of the Yale-China Association and the Asia and Ford Foundations', cultural education 'served the goal of containment while also obfuscating what containment meant' (pp. 6 and 3).

As a result of the Chinese civil war in the late 1940s, hundreds of thousands of refugees – rich and poor, young and old – fled from the mainland to the British colony of Hong Kong. Hong Kong's resources and facilities, including post-secondary school places, were stretched to the limit. After 1949, the People's Republic of China (PRC) attempted to lure young Chinese overseas to the mainland for post-secondary education through a mix of financial inducement and patriotic appeals. Beijing targeted not only Hong Kong's youth but also the Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, estimated to be twelve million by the early 1950s. Against this background of Chinese communist penetration through education, the U.S. administration and American NGOs pondered how to 'save' Chinese students for the 'Free World'. Supporting higher education in Hong Kong, to them, appeared to be a desirable and viable means of containing communism on China's periphery. Founded in Changsha (Hunan Province) in 1901, the Yale-China Association had been involved in medical and educational work in China for half a century. With the PRC's seizure of its school in 1951 and expulsion of its staff from the mainland, Yale-China looked to Hong Kong as the alternative site to continue its educational mission. Created in 1951 and partly financed by the Central Intelligence Agency, the Asia Foundation (originally named the Committee for Free Asia) was eager to promote the cause of freedom in the region by supporting New Asia's academic research and development. The Ford Foundation, founded in 1936, was the largest and richest of the three NGOs, and played a crucial role in financing almost all the buildings and infrastructure of New Asia. Besides New Asia, the NGOs also rendered financial assistance to other refugee teachers and intellectuals in Hong Kong.

One of the main reasons why New Asia appealed to the American NGOs, Chou argues, was Hong Kong's 'ambiguous neutrality' (p. 11) in the Cold War, a place that was seemingly free of political partisanship. After 1949 Hong Kong existed in the shadow of Communist China. Although the colonial authorities deemed a direct Chinese attack unlikely, they were all too aware that Beijing could easily subvert the colony from within. For the sake of survival, Hong Kong had to be politically neutral in the Cold War between China and America/Taiwan, or at least to cultivate an image of relative political neutrality. As private philanthropic organizations, Yale-China and the Asia and Ford Foundations were all eager to maintain freedom and flexibility in their operations, and independence from their government. They believed that the creation of a free intellectual space was more important and durable than the sole emphasis on containing communism. In Hong Kong they found a nonpartisan work site where free inquiry and apolitical education could be pursued. Yale-China was particularly anxious to avoid assuming an explicitly pro-American and anti-communist role in Hong Kong, for it still

harboured hopes for returning to the mainland someday. The Asia Foundation and the Ford Foundation, too, benefitted from Hong Kong's ambiguous Cold War position. Even the U.S. government was willing to respect the British-defined neutrality, partly out of its realization of Hong Kong's vulnerability vis-à-vis China and partly due to its reluctance to become directly involved in Hong Kong issues, particularly defence matters.

The American NGOs, moreover, shared New Asia's 'emphasis ... on the study and fortification of Chinese culture rather than on anti-Communism per se' (p. 19). They intended to discredit communism through detailed and objective research on China rather than simplistic attacks on the ills of communism. What the neo-Confucian scholars of New Asia had in mind was cultural education – the study of Eastern and Western philosophy, cultural values, and political thought. Both the Ford and Asia Foundations stressed cultural particularity and the incompatibility of communism to specific societies. To them, communism was 'un-Chinese'; it clashed with the rich Chinese tradition and civilization. By supporting cultural education in New Asia, the American NGOs wanted not only to curb the flow of Chinese students to the mainland, but also to train them as future intellectual leaders in a post-communist China. By preserving Chinese culture, the NGOs believed, New Asia could contribute subtly to the containment of the PRC's influence within the Chinese communities in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia.

Nevertheless, as Chou wrote: 'The ambiguity and ambivalence created by the NGO's perceptions and actions in Hong Kong had the potential not only to confuse but to threaten the goal of containment. Their ambivalence created distance between themselves and U.S. official policy ...' (p. 28) While the American NGOs were committed to 'the education of a culturally cognizant and globally connected intellectual elite whose knowledge and concerns extended far beyond Communism or its containment', the U.S. administration equated cultural education to the Cold War ideological battle with 'an explicitly black-and-white message' (p. 27). Apart from their cognitive gap, however, Chou did not provide some examples as to how the American NGOs actually clashed with Washington regarding New Asia and Cold War policy generally. It could be argued that, as far as the cultural Cold War was concerned, the ambivalent position of NGOs was more a source of strength than of weakness. In Asia and in Europe, U.S. decision-makers and officials were not unaware that the locals were skeptical about state-directed propaganda, information policy, and educational programmes. In waging the cultural Cold War, they were willing to rely on the so-called 'state-private network'. Not only could the 'private sphere' avoid the problem of Congressional reluctance to approve funding for official policy, but the government could also escape public scrutiny and criticisms especially if a policy went wrong. Above all, voluntary agencies and foundations were more 'legitimate', prestigious, and knowledgeable in carrying out cultural and educational programmes. This is not to say that all the NGOs were willing and conscious agents of Washington's Cold War policy. Rather, the relationship between the state and the private sector was one of collaboration, negotiation, and accommodation. But given their close connections in leadership and funding, the American NGOs and the U.S.

government certainly shared the universality of democratic values and embraced the crusade against communism, albeit in different ways.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the ambivalent position of Yale-China and the Asia and Ford Foundations probably strengthened rather than weakened Washington's policy of anti-communist containment. This was particularly so in such a politically vulnerable place as Hong Kong, where the colonial authorities needed to strike a delicate balance between Communist China and Britain/America. To take one instance, in the early 1950s, the Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals, Inc. (ARCI) – a pro-Taiwan American NGO founded by prominent U.S. politicians, businessmen, and scholars under the leadership of Congressman Walter Judd – had proposed to create a Chinese-medium university in Hong Kong through the amalgamation of the existing 'refugee colleges', but the proposal was rejected by the Hong Kong government. Undoubtedly, colonial officials were concerned about the political background of ARCI: they welcomed the involvement of only politically 'neutral' American NGOs in Hong Kong's education. (In 1963 New Asia, together with two other post-secondary colleges, established the Chinese University of Hong Kong on their own initiative.)

That said, Chou has written an engaging and insightful article, which addresses a number of broader themes (some more implicit than others), such as the role of philanthropy in U.S. foreign policy, the interplay between education and politics in colonial Hong Kong, and the cultural Cold War in Asia.

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<sup>2</sup> On the notion of 'state-private network', see, for example, W. Scott Lucas, 'Beyond Freedom, Beyond Control: Approaches to Culture and the State-Private Network in the Cold War', in Giles Scott-Smith and Hans Krabbendam (eds.), *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe, 1945-1960* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), pp. 53-72.