CHUNMEI DU

Occupational Hazard: American Servicemen's Sensory Encounters with China, 1945–1949*

In January 1947, William W. Lockwood, future president of the Association for Asian Studies, who had served for eighteen months as a U.S. Army officer in China, wrote that the "first venture in large scale American tourism in China" caused "many sour, even hostile, reactions to the Chinese." He asked: Did millions of returned young GIs "gain a sympathetic and tolerant understanding of that world? Or were their home town prejudices simply confirmed?"[1] This intriguing question should be understood not only as a critical reflection on the U.S. wartime presence in China, but also in the context of U.S. postwar involvement in the region.[2]

The expanding U.S. military presence after World War II exposed tens of thousands of servicemen and women to lives beyond their comfort zones back home. While performing assigned missions, determined by high-level diplomatic exchanges, political negotiations, and military strategies, U.S. soldiers on the ground often forged intimate connections with local populations by exchanging goods, services, language, and culture. These encounters both followed and contradicted official policies and popular representations. The rich corpus of studies on the U.S. military overseas has demonstrated that existing hierarchies of gender, race, and class informed attitudes, policies, and practices on both sides, and can be traced to earlier imperial traditions and colonial institutions.[3] Meanwhile, recent Cold War international history has broadened the

*I thank Diana Lemberg and the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions. This research is supported by a general research grant from the Hong Kong Research Grants Council (13602120).

1. William W. Lockwood, "The GI in wartime China," *Far Eastern Survey* 19, no. 1 (January 15, 1947): 9.

2. See e.g. Marc Gallicchio, *The Scramble for Asia: U.S. Military Power in the Aftermath of the Pacific War* (New York, 2008); Akira Iriye, "Contemporary History as History: American Expansion into the Pacific Since 1941," *Pacific Historical Review* 53, no. 2 (1984): 191–212; Ronald H. Spector, *In the Ruins of Empire: The Japanese Surrender and the Battle for Postwar Asia* (New York, 2007).

3. See e.g. John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York, 1986); Petra Goedde, *GIs and Germans: Culture, Gender, and Foreign Relations, 1945–1949* (New Haven, CT, 2003); Maria Höhn and Seungsook Moon, eds., *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire from World War Two to the Present* (Durham, NC, 2010); Katharine H. S. Moon, *Sex among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.–Korea Relations* (New York, 1997); Mary Louise Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France* (Chicago, IL, 2013).

Diplomatic History, Vol. 00, No. 0 (2022). https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dhac076

scope of inquiry to include accounts of various types of informal cultural exchanges by previously neglected groups, ranging from artists, tourists, and immigrants to military families.[4] Christina Klein, for example, has identified the late 1940s and 1950s as a distinct cultural moment during which Americans became fascinated with Asia and the Pacific through the proliferation of popular cultural productions. Thanks to the empire's unprecedented expansion in the region during the Cold War, Americans produced and consumed a proliferation of new plays, movies, novels, and nonfiction books about Asia.[5] If these works helped to propagate the new ideology of global integration accompanied by mutual understanding and benefits, the large number of U.S. troops, which an Army official guide to China called "ambassador[s] of the American people," formed a direct force of grassroots diplomacy.[6] Together with the letters, memoirs, photos, souvenirs, reports, and stories they brought home, American soldiers' intimate encounters abroad encompassed and went beyond mere cultural representation to shape postwar American identities and locals' perceptions of the United States in significant ways.

Existing studies of postwar U.S. occupations in the world often overlook China, partly because of the relatively small number of troops in the country and their brief stay. American troops in China, the majority from the Army, numbered sixty thousand before Japan's surrender. In September 1945, over fifty thousand Marines of the III Marine Amphibian Corps (IIIAC) were sent from the Pacific to North China for occupation missions. Together with naval forces from the Seventh Fleet and over one thousand members of the U.S. Military Advisory Group, including the navy and army groups, they formed the bulk of the U.S. troops in postwar China.[7] While certain Marine units were assigned to guard railway lines in North China and Manchuria, American enlisted men were concentrated in the major cities that constituted China's political, economic, and cultural centers: Nanjing, Beijing, Qingdao, Shanghai, and Tianjin. The total number of troops quickly fell from a historical peak of 113,000 to below 12,000 by the end of 1946, and only several thousand personnel remained on the eve of the Communist victory.

The limited scholarly attention to the U.S. military in China can also be attributed to the ambiguous and incoherent nature of its objectives there. The

Also see Emily S. Rosenberg and Shanon Fitzpatrick, eds., *Body and Nation: The Global Realm of U.S. Body Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC, 2014).

4. See e.g. Donnah Alvah, *Unofficial Ambassadors: American Military Families Overseas and the Cold War, 1946–1965* (New York, 2007); Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA, 2004); Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945–1961* (Berkeley, CA, 2009).

5. Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*.

6. U.S. Army Service Forces, *A Pocket Guide to China* (Washington, DC, 1942), 44.

7. Katherine K. Reist, "The American Military Advisory Missions to China, 1945–1949," *The Journal of Military History* 77, no. 4 (2013): 1379–1398; Ren Donglai, "1941–1949 nian Meiguo zai Zhongguo de junshijigou jiqi yange" [American military institutions in China and their evolvements, 1941–1949], *Minguo dangan* 1 (2003): 70–77; Henry I. Shaw, *The United States Marines in North China, 1945–1949* (Washington, DC, 1968).

initial Marine occupation missions included accepting Japanese surrenders, repatriating Japanese soldiers and civilians, transporting Nationalist troops to north and central China, and liberating and rehabilitating Allied internees and prisoners of war. But assisting the Nationalist government while remaining neutral in the midst of an expanding civil war created "an intangible mission" difficult to explain or perform, as stated by Major General Keller Rockey, commander of the IIIAC.[8] More broadly, and long after these initial goals were achieved, many U.S. military personnel continued to engage in a variety of roles in China, such as assisting the relief efforts of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), training Chinese troops, advising the Nationalist government, observing the Chinese Communists, and protecting American lives and property. Concerned about Soviet assistance to the Communists and U.S. strategic interests in the region, the Navy used the port of Qingdao as a major fleet anchorage in the Far East and defended it with several thousand Marines until late May 1949.

Unlike Japan and Korea, China was an ally, and the U.S. military tried to educate its soldiers to respect the Chinese—who were said to be humorous, practical, family-oriented, democratic, and generally "like Americans"—as civilized equals.[9] GIs were officially "invited guests" of the Nationalist government of a sovereign nation. Nevertheless, the U.S. military entered North China as a liberating and occupying army, and a similar power asymmetry was embedded in Sino–American interactions at national and individual levels: from continued extraterritoriality to racist attitudes and prevalent GI misbehavior. Despite the initial welcome extended by locals, who had been under Japanese rule for years, widespread anti-American protests developed in postwar China, which denounced the continued U.S. military presence as an explicit expression of foreign imperialism and encroachment upon national sovereignty.

This lack of attention overlooks the real effects that the presence of the GIs in China had on both the local population and the GIs themselves, much of which were mediated through grassroots interactions.[10] Hence, this article examines the U.S. servicemen's everyday lives in postwar China through their sensory encounters, drawing on a variety of materials in both languages, including published and unpublished memoirs and oral history records, military and government publications, and popular periodicals.[11] A sensory history approach

8. Michael Parkyn, "Operation BELEAGUER: The Marine III Amphibious Corps in North China, 1945–49," *Marine Corps Gazette* 85, no. 7 (2001): 32–37.

9. U.S. Army Service Forces, *A Pocket Guide to China*, 4–8, 42.

10. For a few studies that have addressed the sociopolitical impacts of American soldiers in postwar China, see Zach Fredman, *The Tormented Alliance: American Servicemen and the Occupation of China, 1941–1949* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2022), chapter 6; Xixiao Guo, "Paradise or Hell Hole? U.S. Marines in Post–World War II China," *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 7, no. 3/4, (1998): 157–85; Hong Zhang, *America Perceived: The Making of Chinese Images of the United States, 1945–1953* (Westport, CT, 2002).

11. No black troops were stationed in postwar Chinese cities, due to the Nationalist government's racist restrictions, and female personnel were also limited to a small number from the

is adopted because of the ubiquity in GI accounts of their visceral experiences as they went on sightseeing trips to the Forbidden City, smelled the honeydipper carts on the street, ate water buffalo meat, danced with Chinese women, and learned pidgin Chinese. This approach is also inspired by existing scholarship on sensory history, especially from those studying international relations. Mark Smith, a major proponent of this approach, has called for diplomatic historians to attend closely to the senses when studying transnational encounters and has identified international relations and the non-Western world as two major areas of potential future research.[12] In his works on British rule in India and the American empire in the Philippines, Andrew Rotter shows how the agents of empire accentuated the importance of the senses as criteria for measuring colonial subjects against "civilized" standards.[13] Susan Carruthers's work on American soldiers in occupied Europe and Asia reveals the intimate politics of disgust in their everyday latrine usage and reforms.[14] In these critical studies, sensory stereotypes, sensory metaphors, and the construction of the sensory self and otherness are treated as a lens through which to view the deployment of power, rather than simply as an embellishment to spice up the subject of inquiry.[15]

Overall, U.S. soldiers' sensory encounters with China were characterized by both fascination and contempt, enchantment and alienation. Their senses were sometimes assaulted by the dust, dirt, noise, and stench of what they called "the Orient," and other times satisfied by its many comforting tastes and gentle touches. The existing Orientalist framing presented GIs with a variety of linguistic, aesthetic, and moral options when conceptualizing Chinese society, ranging from premodern tranquility and a peaceful society to Oriental cruelty, deception, and corruption. The realpolitik of wartime propaganda, assisted by American popular media, spread new positive images of the Chinese allies, from the country's beautiful scenery to its well-educated and democratic Chinese people represented by Madam Chiang Kai-shek. GIs' portraits of China, consequently, often shifted between two opposite poles: Chinese cities and

Women's Army Corps. See Marc Gallicchio, "Colouring the Nationalists: The African-American Construction of China in the Second World War," *International History Review* 20, no. 3 (1998): 571–596; Mai Tian, "Meiguo nübing zai Shanghai" [American female soldiers in Shanghai], *Shen bao*, December 17, 1945.

12. Mark M. Smith, *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (Berkeley, CA, 2007), 130–131; idem., *A Sensory History Manifesto* (University Park, PA, 2021).

13. Andrew J. Rotter, "Empire of the Senses: How Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching Shaped Imperial Encounters," *Diplomatic History* 35, no. 1 (2011): 3–19; idem., *Empires of the Senses: Bodily Encounters in Imperial India and the Philippines* (New York, 2019).

14. Susan L. Carruthers, "Latrines as the Measure of Men: American Soldiers and the Politics of Disgust in Occupied Europe and Asia," *Diplomatic History* 42, no. 1 (2018): 109–37.

15. See e.g. David Howes, ed., *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Cultural Reader* (New York and Oxford, 2005); "The Senses in American History: A Round Table," *The Journal of American History* 95, no. 2 (2008): 378–451; "The AHR Forum: The Senses in History," *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 2 (2011): 307–400.

countryside were both peaceful and foul; food was delicious and poisonous; women elegant and dangerous; people hardworking and dishonest, or hospitable and cruel. It may not surprise us that racist contempt continued to fill the pages of GI memoirs. However, their sensory experiences and accounts sometimes went against their American "rationality" and military instructions to avoid dangerous food and women. For example, many indulged in Chinese cuisine and bargained with Chinese hawkers, thus inventing new Americanisms, tastes, and identities that were transferred back to the postwar United States. The mental and visceral domains became intricately linked through the exchanges of objects and experiences in everyday encounters.

The senses provide a historical and analytical lens through which to examine the entangled everyday politics of U.S. military involvement in postwar China. Servicemen served as both a military and a diplomatic force representing the United States, and were seen as such by members of the Chinese population, who before this had rarely encountered Americans in their lives. While GIs' sensory experiences and narratives were conditioned by preexisting racial prejudice, their cultural identities were reshaped by intimate interactions through new sights, smells, tastes, sounds, and touches. Overall, this article hopes to facilitate a more nuanced understanding of postwar Sino-U.S. relations beyond the "loss of China" narrative, which is defined by the country's drastic regime change and its ideological conflicts with the United States in subsequent years. This article also contributes to the study of the mid-twentieth-century American ideology of global integration by highlighting how these informal ambassadors' actual experience belied the rhetoric of reciprocity.

IN SEARCH OF OLD CHINA

In September 1945, Marine Private E. B. Sledge's first sight of north China from his train window was of a "desolate landscape": "Everything was windswept, dusty, and brown. Different shades of brown, but brown nevertheless." Upon disembarking, the first building he saw was "the imposing ancient multistory tower of the Chien Men Gate" in Beijing, which "stood like a massive fortress atop the huge centuries-old wall around the city." Soon, he arrived at his billet, located in the historical Legation Quarters, where "one could see evidence of repairs on the walls from damage during the Boxer Rebellion in 1899."[16] The so-called Peking siege was broken by foreign troops, including Americans, becoming one of the earliest Marine Corps missions in China. For Second Lieutenant John B. Simms, the initial Chinese scene was farmlands with dirt roads, "drab and totally lacking color," and uniformed people where "one group faded into the next without distinction" because of the "sameness of their clothing, dark blue or black for the most part with a brighter blue or white being almost the only contrast." Shortly afterwards, "wandering through the

16. E. B. Sledge, *China Marine: An Infantryman's Life after World War II* (Oxford, 2002), 17–20.

old city" of Tianjin "introduced the American to sights, sounds, and smells that clouded the senses and left him gasping."[17]

It was not uncommon to see Westerners project a preindustrial tranquility and lifestyle free from technological dominance or Western influence onto war-torn China. Through a romantic lens, "China was a timeless land"; "people were not rushing through life as victims of a timeframe set by machines"; and "on a whole, daily life moved unhurriedly along just as it had for centuries."[18] It was a picturesque land frozen in time, captured by the foreign tourist's eyes, and resembling those images from *National Geographic*, *Life*, the Pearl Buck novels, and wartime propaganda films: "various rice paddies going up the mountain, giant bamboo growing, fast-running mountain streams, little clusters of villages."[19] At first sight, "the river banks were green and beautiful," and "China was one place which lived up to preconceived notions."[20]

Once they got settled into their new occupation duties, GIs, who had ample liberty, went on sightseeing tours of the Forbidden City, the Temple of Heaven, and the Great Wall, among other ancient treasures. Two other Chinese sights that featured in GI accounts were women with bound feet and rickshaw men. "It was fascinating to watch the human show pass through and around the station," including "several elderly women hobble past with their tottering stiff-kneed gait of those who had their feet bound since infancy."[21] The act of "watching" turned into a fad, as GIs looked for these women everywhere and even requested locals' help in finding them. To the initial surprise and disappointment of some newly-landed Marines, Chinese streets were not filled with bound feet or pigtails, as in Hollywood movies. The chances of spotting such phenomena became even slimmer after the Chinese government prohibited local interpreters from taking GIs on trips to search for these sights in more rural areas, stating that these activities would damage the image of China and harm national dignity.[22]

Yet these young men soon found something far more accessible to photograph: the rickshaw. Servicemen routinely took rides while on liberty and also enjoyed racing each other when pulling rickshaw men (see figure 1). GI patronage reenergized the declining business of rickshaw pulling, which had been threatened both by competing forms of transportation and repeated government attempts to ban what many reformers saw as a backward social institution and

17. John B. Simms, "Memoir," n.d., the John B. Simms Collection (COLL/3308), 2–3, Archives Branch, U.S. Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, Virginia (hereafter USMC).

18. Sledge, *China Marine*, 51.

19. Robert H. Barrow, oral history transcript, session II, January 28, 1986, USMC.

20. Elmo R. Zumwalt, *On Watch: A Memoir* (New York, 1976), 8.

21. Simms, "Memoir," 5.

22. "Nanjingshi zhengfu xunling" [Nanjing municipal government orders], November 19, 1945, 1004001012 7(00)0002, Nanjing Municipal Archives, Nanjing, China (hereafter NMA); "Tianjinshi zhengfu xunling" [Tianjin municipal government orders], November 15, 1945, J0025-3-002525-001, Tianjin Municipal Archive, Tianjin, China (hereafter TMA).

Figure 1: Left: "U.S. Marines and Chinese rickshaw pullers," Dewitt Peck personal papers, COLL/3033, USMC; right: "A female Allied soldier riding a Shanghai rickshaw," November, 1945, from Image Database of Modern China [Zhongguo jindai yingxiang shujuku].

national humiliation. GIs' fascination with the rickshaw led to the further invention of a "spectacular entertainment": an official Stars & Stripes rickshaw derby was held on December 1, 1945, in which nineteen "jockeys," girls from the Allied forces, were pulled by Chinese coolies as "horses" (see figure 1). This event attracted the cheering roar of thousands of GI spectators who gathered at a stadium originally built for greyhound racing in the former French Concession. According to John Hersey, an eminent reporter and writer born into a missionary family in China, the winning jockey was crowned "Miss Rickshaw" by General Albert C. Wedemeyer, commander of American forces in China, and "the winning horse was given a floral horseshoe" and a prize of about seven U.S. dollars.[23] While Chinese media criticized the implicit dog analogy, the winning rickshaw man was invited by the chairman of Madison Square Garden to compete with a famous American runner in New York City.[24] After reports in major U.S. periodicals, this GI creation led to such an enthusiastic response that a Sino-American sporting event was proposed to recreate the spectacle and provide a thrilling experience for audiences back home.

The exotic old China was not only observed and documented in letters and tales, it was also worn, embodied, and taken home via souvenirs. Officers and soldiers alike went out antique hunting for silk, vases, carved wooden cases, embroidered shoes, copper Buddhas, and jade necklaces (see figure 2). GIs wore old gowns with dragon embroidery from the Peking opera, donned traditional silk caps, held Chinese pipes, sat straight on tricycles, or pulled rickshaws.[25]

23. John Hersey, "Letter from Shanghai," *The New Yorker* (February 9, 1946): 82–90; "Shanghai 'huangbaoche huanghou' jingsai" [The Stars & Stripes Ricksha Derby], *Shanghai tuhua xinwen* [The illustrated Shanghai News] 6 (1946): 19.

24. "Niuyue juxing renliche bisai" [New York holds rickshaw race], *Shen bao*, April 3, 1946.

25. Norman G. Albert, *Yohouse from a Boot to a China Marine* (Bloomington, IN, 2011): 76–77.

Figure 2: John E. Morgan photographs, COLL/1210, USMC.

Led by the so-called old China hands, who had served in China in the prewar years, their younger pals were said to have stormed the burial clothing store and bought out the entire stock of ingot-shaped pillows for the dead and outdated hookahs, now priced ten times higher, in order to "show off the 'exotic world' to their loved ones back home."[26]

A popular destination for fine quality souvenirs, China was also seen as a major hub for cheap and fake goods, with U.S. soldiers learning "the majority of the confidence rackets originated in China," from hand-carved "antique" wooden chests that split as soon as they were placed in a warm room to liquor bottles refilled with local concoctions and given Johnny Walker seals, and empty beer cans that had been transformed into beautifully made "sterling" filigree jewelry.[27] Despite the outdatedness of the "Oriental products" that GIs demanded, businesses happily catered to American tastes and recreated products and services, many of which were no longer used in actual Chinese life. Store names changed to "Alaska, TIPTOP, PEiHAi, GISMO, America, and other sorts of weird names," and were decorated with new Orientalist aesthetics. Stepping into a Qingdao bar, for example, one immediately encountered new vermillion curtains with embroidered yellow flowers reaching the floor, dragons

26. Zhai Wen, "Haoqi lieyan de zhuHua Meibing" [Curious GIs philandering in Shanghai], *ZhongMei zhoubao* 174 (1946): 17–19.

27. Simms, "Memoir," 18–19.

on two fake columns, and four or five palace lanterns in red gauze, all aimed at creating an "Oriental atmosphere."[28]

As American servicemen searched for the old China in their daily visual encounters, the Orientalist symbolism of their visual representations and imaginings was far from subtle. Despite their frequent visits to grand restaurants, dance halls, and shopping malls that were as magnificent as those in New York City, they made little reference to the modern sensations these sites evoked. Instead, it was the imagined old China that showed up on the Chinese screen, which they were constantly and intensely looking at and looking for. Like the white visitors touring U.S. Chinatowns with their fake opium dens and other staged "authentic" Chinese scenes, which gave them a feeling of superiority, a display of the old China helped to confirm GIs' cultural and moral superiority and justify their postwar occupation.[29]

"CHINKS' STINK"

While the peaceful and beautiful Orient was framed, wrapped, and ready to be shipped home, China's everyday miasma turned out to be unbearable and dangerous to both the nose and the mind. Stench, invading the senses with offensive odors, was the strongest sensory experience in GI accounts. City sewage was an utter disaster. No one taking a stroll in Shanghai could escape the filthy, stinking Suchow Creek, surrounded by thousands of Chinese refugees living in little houseboats or junks and using the creek as a garbage dump, for sewage disposal, and as their sole source of water.[30] In the streets of Beijing, one easily ran into "honeydipper" carts that collected human excrement around the city, which was then sold to farmers as fertilizer. As one Marine warned, "on a warm day it was prudent to detour past these carts to avoid the foul odor from the semiliquid contents."[31] The countryside turned out to be even worse. "Whether it was animal or human waste, rotting vegetation or cooking odors, it all seemed to have a certain rank solidity that one had to accept and learn to live with or be constantly on the verge of gagging."[32]

GIs' aversion to the rancid smells was a result of changing notions of odor, disease, and cleanliness in the United States. Stench had been increasingly associated with disease, lack of sanitation, and poor public health since at least the nineteenth century, as industrialization in the Western world changed the urban landscape.[33] Odors of excrement and decaying human and animal corpses,

28. Dong Fangpeng, "Qingdao Meijun yao chetui zhiqian" [Before the American military's withdrawal from Qingdao], *Xinwen zazhi* [News magazine weekly] 2, no. 9 (1949): 16.

29. Yong Chen, *Chop Suey, USA: The Story of Chinese Food in America* (New York, 2014), 99–101.

30. Simms, "Memoir," 22.

31. Sledge, *China Marine*, 47–49.

32. Simms, "Memoir," 25.

33. Melanie A. Kiechle, *Smell Detectives: An Olfactory History of Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (Seattle, WA, 2017).

which had pervaded the public and private spaces of the poor, drew considerable attention from elites and social reformers. The fear of and policies against odors reflected popular understandings of disease and disease transmission, especially germ theories, which revolutionized the understanding of odors. Meanwhile, throughout twentieth-century United States, "the drive to bathe, shower, and deodorize spread throughout society," and "soaps, deodorants, and other hygiene products were at the forefront of mass consumer culture," constructing the sweatless, odorless, and successful middle class."[34]

It is also important to note that U.S. soldiers' portrayals focused not on industrial stench, but rather on the atavistic filth of old China, particularly the pungent stench emanating from excrement. The sniffers' attention to sewage and filth reflected fears of an archaic population before and outside civilization, rather than the common fear of urban degeneration in the Western world. Smells are subjective, conditional, and markers of otherness, and one's own smell is rarely regarded as stink. Soldiers seemed to have forgotten that they themselves had recently "looked so filthy and bedraggled in the steaming heat on Peleliu's rugged ridges and in the corpse-reeking morass at Shuri, Okinawa"; they instead turned all the attention of their nostrils to Chinese odors.[35] However, Allied soldiers became aware of their own body smells when the Chinese in the countryside held their noses and dogs bared their teeth whenever they passed.[36]

In American military men's accounts, China's stench and squalor were not only linked to the poor, as begging children, homeless refugees, and ragged urchins filled up modern cities and polluted creeks, but also often went hand-in-hand with Chinese culture. They were shocked to see "how cheaply human life is sometimes held," ranging from an "often brutal and callous approach to life in China" due to the need for survival to "absolute disregard for life" even among friends and families. More understanding minds often noted the impacts of war and violence on Chinese society, such as economic devastation, dislocation, and human suffering, which were rarely experienced in American lives. As one explained, "Survival is said to be the primary driving force in every human life, a fact that is often almost forgotten in our middle class American existence," and "the sanitation a westerner was accustomed to simply didn't exist."[37] But most still linked the stench and suffering of the poor to China's inherent backwardness and human cruelty. In these portrayals, the Chinese stench became an indication of the country's backwardness, which was unaffected by modernity and was ultimately attributed to racial inferiority.

---

34. Mark S. R. Jenner, "Follow Your Nose? Smell, Smelling, and Their Histories," *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 2 (2011): 339; Suellen Hoy, *Chasing Dirt: The American Pursuit of Cleanliness* (Oxford, 1995).

35. Sledge, *China Marine*, 32–33.

36. F. X. Moloney, "They Went to China," *Wings: Official Magazine of the R.A.A.F.* 5, no. 12 (September 18, 1945): 9.

37. Simms, "Memoir," 15, 25, 34.

In fact, "filthy Chinese" had been a powerful narrative since the nineteenth century, as adopted by Western observers and even Chinese reformers.[38] Odors were used as the markings of peoples and civilization. In the United States, Chinatowns had long been associated with stench, providing further evidence of Chinese "purported racial inferiority" and "grounds for their exclusion."[39] White noses associated Chinese food with the strange odors of the East, including "squid, rats, and offal, all of which were regarded as embodying the strange and repulsive lifestyle and diet of the Chinese."[40] Resembling a colonial narrative, whiteness signified cleanliness, purity, and health, while Chineseness was marked as inherently repugnant. In postwar Japan, "disgust dominated the affective palette of occupation soldiers" contributing to the ways in which boundaries between Americans and the occupied were redrawn in the chaotic aftermath of the war.[41] Despite China's allied status, GIs were also preconditioned to sniff the "Chinks' stink," and stench became a dominant mode through which they experienced the Chinese universe, enforcing preexisting notions of national and civilizational hierarchies.[42] In a way, the China stench continued to spread as a racialized smell in the postwar era.

As Susan Carruthers has shown in her study of the U.S. occupation of Japan, "latrines were indeed the measure of men—a yardstick by which civilizational standards could readily be appraised."[43] Discussions on human waste and the toilet were at the core of the China stench, including the official guide that cautioned soldiers that "throughout China toilet facilities are by our standards worse than primitive."[44] Indeed, one of the initial assaults U.S. soldiers encountered in China turned out to be not from armed Japanese troops, but rather from squat toilets. On a train from Tanggu to Tianjin, one Marine described the toilet as "the subject of much discussion among the troops . . . there was no seat, and the toilet bowl was recessed into the floor." But quickly the excitement over "a source of fascination" descended into a disgust of the odor, due to "a lack of all types of maintenance" that "was typical of Chinese trains."[45] The exotic turned out to be not so benign, but a menacing cultural shock. While performing their initial occupation mission of transporting Nationalist troops, U.S. servicemen further encountered an olfactory assault from the Chinese troops, who were described as "urinating on the deck, and even in the scuttlebutts; sitting on urinal troughs to bathe; dipping toothbrushes into water in the

38. Hu Cheng, "'Buweisheng' de Huaren xingxiang: Zhongwai jian de butong jiangshu" [Image of the "unsanitary Chinese": Differing narratives between foreigners and the Chinese], *Bulletin of the Institute of Modern History Academia Sinica* 56 (2007): 1–43.
39. C.Y. Chiang, "Monterey-by-the-Smell," *Pacific Historical Review* 73, no. 2 (2004): 213.
40. Chen, *Chop Suey, USA*, 82–85.
41. Carruthers, "Latrines as the Measure of Men," 112.
42. Guo, "Paradise or Hell Hole?," 168.
43. Carruthers, "Latrines as the Measure of Men," 112.
44. U.S. Army Service Forces, *A Pocket Guide to China*, 20.
45. Sledge, *China Marine*, 15–16.

heads when cleaning their teeth; taking showers fully clothed; expectorating on decks and bulkheads all over the ship; throwing uneaten rice on the deck; standing instead of sitting on toilet seats, thus distributing fecal material over a wide area; and occasionally failing to use toilets at all."[46]

Americans took pride in their modern plumbing technology. Yet to make a flush toilet work, there were in fact many technological hurdles to cross: water pipes, pumps, screws, many little pieces that made up the miraculous invention. Flushing toilets were found in the modern city of Shanghai as early as the 1880s but their usage remained limited in China as a whole. Most of the interior lacked access to running water and the majority of Chinese populations, even those in cities, still used the traditional system of Chinese latrines, including various types of pit latrines, bucket toilets, and chamber pots. After the war, most people continued to use covered or open-air outhouses and public toilets, or simply resorted to open defecation. Manure collectors gathered feces from urban dwellers' houses and public toilets, and then sold the collected waste to peasants.

When U.S. servicemen resided in major Chinese cities after the war, they occupied designated modern hostels and hotels, former foreign concessions, university campuses, and guest houses built for them, along with other privileged sites equipped with modern facilities. They, therefore, had access to Western-style toilets linked to running water, indoor plumbing, and an underground sewage system. Generals and high-level officers stayed in fancy Western hotels and beautifully furnished houses seized from citizens of enemy European nations, who were longtime residents of China. These homes were equipped with flushing toilets, bathtubs, heaters, fireplaces, stove-top kitchens, and large numbers of servants—a luxurious lifestyle unavailable to most officers back home.

While American officers and soldiers enjoyed clean, smell-free toilets and modern conveniences and comfort physically separated from the majority of the living conditions for the Chinese, they remained wary of the potential dangers that the permeating Chinese stench posed to their health and safety and took up cleaning campaigns to eradicate the threat and reform local bodies. For mosquito and insect control, the U.S. military helped the Chinese government aerial spray the major cities of Nanjing, Qingdao, Beijing, and Guangzhou. At other times, they initiated actions that were neither requested nor well received by locals. In Nanjing, members of the Army Advisory Group requested that the municipal government spray all the farm fields and soil pits surrounding their residence with DDT, as well as remove the soil pits. Angry representatives from the local silk worm industry protested that such unrestricted DDT spraying would kill worms and put peasants' livelihoods in danger; at the same time, accommodating local officials, who had conducted several on-site investigations, also stated that it was impossible to entirely eradicate over one hundred soil

46. Guo, "Paradise or Hell Hole?," 168.

pits.[47] When GIs shared living space with the Chinese, direct action was often taken. Before embarkation, U.S. medical officers would use DDT powder to delouse the Chinese soldiers and give them a lesson on using the bathroom. The war against the Japanese might be over, but another battle needed to be launched against the "Chinks' stench," as "indiscriminate vomiting from seasickness, coupled with the Chinese body odor and the uriniferous atmosphere made this desirable."[48] Though on a much smaller scale, these demands and actions presented a striking resemblance to the sanitizing projects to reform foreign bodies that the U.S. military imposed in postwar occupied enemy nations who would "experience defeat in the most humiliatingly intimate fashion."[49]

Smells are pedagogical, as they demarcate self and other, and help to justify one's actions to reform others. The Americans were not the only ones who attempted sensory reforms on Chinese bodies. The New Life Movement, officially launched by Chiang Kai-shek in 1934, for example, also propagated rinsing and brushing teeth, cutting nails, and bathing regularly, and forbad spitting on the street or urinating in public, as part of living a clean, sanitized, modern, and moral life.[50] However, the smellscapes of China in American servicemen's nostrils were considered uniformly foul and innately backward. Smell was invoked to confirm racial and national hierarchies rather than for nation-building.

Food Hogs the Limelight

CHAMPAGNE BAR

BEST DRINKS, FRESH FOODS

WITH BEAUTIFUL WAITRESS

RESONABLE PRICE

15 RACE COURSE ROAD

TUNGLOU TIENTSIN[51]

It is only natural that people far away from home seek familiar cuisines to satisfy their palates, as taste is one of the most enduring sensations humans long for and remember. With the empire's industrial boom and global reach, the U.S. military tried to recreate a healthy and familiar gastronomic world for their servicemen afar, including the C and K ration packs of combat food and the B rations for field kitchens. American soldiers were "the best fed in the world

47. Exchanges between the Nanjing government and the American military, 1947, 100300606 31 (00) 0005, 0010, 0011, 0062, NMA.

48. Guo, "Paradise or Hell Hole?," 168.

49. Carruthers, "Latrines as the Measure of Men," 124.

50. See Federica Ferlanti, "The New Life Movement in Jiangxi Province, 1934–1938," *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 5 (2010): 961–1000.

51. Albert, *Yobouse from a Boot to a China Marine*, 74.

during the Second World War," as "the standard ration provided on military bases contained a staggering 4,300 calories," and "men at the front were allocated 4,758 calories a day."[52]

Interestingly, eating was also one of the few areas of life where U.S. soldiers were more willing to leave their comfort zones, out of necessity, curiosity, or a combination of both. If GIs disdained China's smells, most loved Chinese food, regardless of their rank or status. During the war, Chinese dinner was served once weekly in the U.S. Army headquarters in Chongqing, showing "how popular Chinese food is with these Yanks."[53] For veterans transferred to postwar China from the Pacific, who had become fed up with the concentrated ration packs that left extremely unpalatable aftertastes, fresh food was their top priority upon reentering civilization.[54] American servicemen hired houseboys to cook and clean, and ate in restaurants when they had liberty, or had a friend bring takeout when they were on duty. When it came to food and service, they were "living in the splendor."[55] Food provided a direct gateway into China, exposing GIs to a new culinary world beyond "the Anglo-Saxon model of meat and two vegetables" as served up in the homogenous U.S. military canteen meals.[56]

There were also plenty of banquets for all ranks of the enlisted to attend. The Chinese government promoted cultural diplomacy to enhance Sino-U.S. understanding, and feasting was always a priority. Western-educated elites opened their homes to the Americans, hoping that "a taste of the Chinese home-cooked food" and "a glimpse of the Chinese home life" might help to eliminate some of the "distorted ideas about Chinese life and views."[57] Chinese officials frequently invited American officers to banquets to show appreciation, and soldiers also attended various victory parties characterized by long feasts. In fact, food was used by both sides to create trust and rapport among allies and hostile groups. In the north of Qinhuangdao, a certain Captain Wu of the Nationalist Army became an "instant devotee" of "Toddy," a chocolate powder drink that was offered to him by a Marine detachment officer, which kept the "mutual friendship strong" and "cooperation close," despite the fact that initially neither could understand a word of the other.[58]

In a similar story, food provided a safe pathway for captured Marines. Thomas E. Williams, an intelligence officer based in Qingdao who received a Bronze Star for rescuing three American aviators from the Communist territory, attributed the success of his mission to "the help of quite a lot of chefoo brandy," which had created "the friendliest Chinese communists everyone has

52. Lizzie Collingham, *The Taste of War: World War Two and the Battle for Food* (New York, 2013), 415–439.
53. Tao, "'Hao Pu Hao?'"
54. Sledge, *China Marine*, 25.
55. Hersey, "Letter from Shanghai," 85.
56. Collingham, *The Taste of War*, 438.
57. Tao, "'Hao Pu Hao?'"
58. Simms, "Memoir," 30–31.

ever seen."[59] This food diplomacy predated Richard Nixon's "chopsticks diplomacy" in his successful state banquet that resulted in the historic Sino-American détente.

The ubiquity of eating makes it a significant site of sentient interaction, as food cultures are directly shaped by class, race, and nationality. As a powerful way to forge and highlight group identities, food was also used to create connections that blurred divisions. Chinese food provided fresh alternatives to American industrial food as well as novel tastes, experiences, and identities. In 1940s U.S. culture, Chinese food was still associated with the cheap and convenient, consumed by middle-class and less-privileged groups. As part of the lingering influence of racial prejudice, Chinese food had been denigrated by anti-Chinese forces in the nineteenth century, and continued to be targeted by white health experts and officials.[60] Many GIs who came to China yearning for chop suey—a stereotypical Chinese food created in the United States and adapted for American tastes—now realized that "we never had real Chinese food before, although all along we thought so."[61] Although some restaurants in China also sold chop suey during and after the war, the dish was advertised as an "authentic American" food instead.[62] Now among the most popular Chinese dishes were "sweet and sour pork or spare ribs cooked in any provincial style, roast duck Szechwan style, fried eel Shanghai style, and bamboo shoots."[63] Sometimes, the dishes not only went beyond white Americans' usual palate, but also against their knowledge of health and received medical advice. After a medical service inspector objected to its black mold coverage, dry-cured ham from Yunnan was banned from GI dining tables. After strong protests, the famous Chinese ham was triumphantly returned to the GI restaurant run by the Nationalist government. Eventually, even the inspector was won over by its irresistible taste and took two of the black hams home.[64]

For many U.S. soldiers in China, almost all of whom were white, eating fancier Chinese food was a physical and cultural experience of its own, rich in flavors and palate sensations. Together with more affluent Chinese families or in fancy restaurants, "we ate, sometimes with hesitation, items strange to the American table but most excellent in flavor. Jellylike, dark green and black 'Hundred Year Old Eggs,' fish stew garnished with chrysanthemum petals, a rice pudding type dish containing nuts and lotus seeds along with other unidentified ingredients, and bird's nest soup rivaled one another for 'most exotic' title, made from the bird's spittle." In contrast to Americans, who were not receptive

59. Thomas E. Williams personal papers (COLL/575), 22–31, USMC.

60. Chen, *Chop Suey, USA*, 126–152.

61. Tao, "'Hao Pu Hao?'"

62. Haiming Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express: A History of Chinese Food in the United States* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2015), 60.

63. Tao, "'Hao Pu Hao?'"

64. Huang Renlin, *Huang Renlin huiyilu* [The Memoir of General Huang Renlin] (Beijing, 2006), 91.

to the idea of offal even during meat-rationed wartime, the Chinese ate ducks' feet and chickens' feet tied with lengths of intestine, pig ears, fish-heads, congealed pigs, chicken and duck blood, and sea-slugs, all of which were considered delicacies.[65] In addition to what the Chinese ate, their ways of cooking, serving, and eating were also a source of marvel. There was a mix of appreciation and discomfort towards Chinese table manners. One officer described the Chinese art of eating as "two beautiful pieces of ivory adroitly moved by five slender fingers is a poem in simple movement."[66] In contrast, an Army verse vividly portrays the attitude to chopsticks of many an ordinary GI Joe: "Some use them like a pair of tweezers; Some use them like a shovel; But some, preferring tools to teasers, Get in the bowl and grovel."[67]

Although the Chinese were generally celebrated as "famous cooks," the danger of food in China could not be overstated. During the first few weeks of their landing, many U.S. troops became victims of intestinal bugs they called "Genghis Khan's Revenge," which was said to be far worse than "Montezuma's Revenge" in Mexico.[68] The Chinese seemed to have developed "an immunity to many of the diseases that kill the white man so easily." Soldiers were to "assume all food and all water is contaminated," as human manure was universally used in China for fertilizer. Additionally, counterfeit liquor proved another major threat. As the official Marine guide warned: "Probably the liquor poured out in your presence from a bottle bearing a reputable brand name is some horrible mixture that will do more to you than you bargained for. The Oriental dispenser of fire water is a clever hombre, to whom the word conscience is a joke."[69]

Chinese liquor was also dangerous because U.S. servicemen became victims of unfamiliar Chinese drinks and drinking rituals. The Army handbook cautioned the imprudent against engaging in drinking bouts with a mild-mannered Chinese host, and there were a variety of unfamiliar Chinese liquors that proved stronger than assumed.[70] Shortly after a second glass of the Chinese grain distilled beverage "bi-gan," a red-haired chief warrant officer fell over, resulting in him needing ten stitches in the lower rear area.[71] The drinking ritual of "bottoms up," or "Gan bei" (gum-bay, kan-pei, gum pei) also proved particularly risky. Some saw "bottoms up" as a local tradition and expression of hospitality, as forcing liquor and food on reluctant guests was a sign of a successful party, an opportunity for winning friendships, or making business go more

65. Simms, "Memoir," 14; Collingham, *The Taste of War*, 432.
66. Tao, "'Hao Pu Hao?'"
67. A. L. Crouch, *China Sketchbook: A Book of Army Verse* (Shanghai, 1946), 15.
68. Simms, "Memoir," 7.
69. U.S. Army Service Forces, *A Pocket Guide to China*, 18, 20; U.S. Marine Corps, *A Marine's Guide to North China* (San Francisco, CA, 1945), 11–13.
70. United States Army Forces, *Here's How: A Handbook for American Troops in China* (China-Burma-India, 1944).
71. Simms, "Memoir," 6.

Figure 3. Simms, "Memoir," 14.

smoothly (see figure 3). But others found "this Chinese style of drinking" game difficult to win when outnumbered. Some recalled it more bitterly as a Chinese trick to make them look stupid.[72] Overall, getting drunk in front of the Chinese was seen as a major source of embarrassment.

Food did not just feed people, it could also feed mutual grievances. When, during the Cairo conference, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt inquired of Chinese official Huang Renlin how the American troops were doing in China, he asked specific questions: Was water buffalo actually served and would his boys really eat this rough meat? In reply, Huang explained that due to the lack of calves in China, alternatives such as water buffalo and even wild yak were provided. But he assured the president that with proper cooking and an excellent recipe, American soldiers could not tell the difference.[73] This amusing personal and diplomatic exchange reflected the drastically different food culture of beef in the two countries. While beef was highly valued as a prime source of energy, and its presence defined a proper American meal, everyday beef consumption inside China remained uncommon in the 1940s, for both economic and cultural reasons.[74] The more important unspoken political context, however, was the ongoing Sino-American dispute over U.S. food consumption in

72. Huang Shang, *Guanyu Meiguo bing* [About American soldiers] (Shanghai, 1947), 30–31.

73. Huang, *Huang Renlin huiyilu*, 124–125.

74. Poon Shuk-wah, "Huniu yu shaniu: Wanqing ji minguo shiqi Zhongguo niurou jingji yinqi de Zhengyi" [To kill or not to kill: Controversies over the beef economy and oxen

China. Huang Renlin was director of China's War Area Service Corps that provided for a variety of American servicemen in a hostel network from 1941 to 1946. Based on agreements, China paid for food and lodging for American troops in China as part of the reverse lend-lease and reciprocal benefits for U.S. aid. However, the two sides continued to disagree on the proper outlay and the type of currency for payment. The U.S. military often found that Chinese service did not meet U.S. standards, and attributed such inadequacy or failure to Chinese graft and incompetency. In contrast, the Chinese side saw their payment as a gesture of generosity and took pains to maintain GIs' American lifestyles by straining finances and making sacrifices, such as exhausting local beef supplies. During his visit to the United States in June, 1944, Kung Hsiang-hsi, the American-educated finance minister and Chiang Kai-shek's brother-in-law, complained in a full-dress conference that one American soldier cost as much as 500 Chinese soldiers, and "very soon there won't be any animals left to help the farmers farm their land."[75] This sentiment was shared by all levels of Chinese officials, who believed excessive American consumption and unfair demands were placing a huge financial burden on China and revealed at least partial disregard of Chinese livelihoods. While well-fed and well-dressed GIs in China had plenty of beef, eggs, milk, alcohol, cigarettes, and candies, Chinese soldiers ate rice, bamboo roots, and pickles, and looked small, malnourished, and filthy.[76]

Such food disputes cast a shadow over Sino-U.S. relations throughout the war, and continued into the postwar era, when the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration clashed with the Chinese National Relief and Rehabilitation Administration over distribution of war surplus supplies and relief goods in China.[77] Food politics extended far beyond the store, kitchen, and dining room, reaching the cattle farmland, the slaughterhouse, presidential memos, and national treaties. The amount of food consumed, and what kind, were markers of hierarchy. In postwar China, food was an intimate contact zone where personal and national diplomacy took place. Sometimes food was exchanged as gifts, gestures of friendship, and a gateway to rapport and life. Other times, food was a site for accommodation and tension, where taste, health, equality, and fairness were contested.

Despite the long-term American prejudice against Chinese food and military warnings against contamination, food choices that servicemen made revealed how preconceived racial and cultural boundaries were often transcended by

protection in late Qing and Republican China], *Shijie lishi pinglun* [The World Historical Review] 3 (2021): 177–203.

75. Arthur N. Young, *China and the Helping hand, 1937–1945* (Cambridge, 1963), 291; Lloyd E. Eastman, "Nationalist China during the Sino-Japanese War 1937–1945," in *The Cambridge History of China* Vol. 13, ed. John K. Fairbank and Albert Feuerwerker (Cambridge, 1986): 589.

76. Huang, *Guanyu Meiguo bing*, 73–84.

77. Rana Mitter, "Imperialism, Transnationalism, and the Reconstruction of Post-war China: UNRRA in China, 1944–7," *Past & Present* 218, no. 8 supplement (2013): 51–69.

actual interactions. As enlisted men tasted a greater variety of Chinese food in China, and did so much more routinely, they began to judge it on culinary rather than merely racial criteria. After the war, the enthusiastic Chinese tea industry stated that the millions of American soldiers stationed in Asia had gotten used to tea drinking and appreciation during the war, and upon their return, became promoters of Chinese tea.[78] The return of U.S. servicemen from China and other parts of Asia also led to a boom in the Chinese restaurant business. Jeno Paulucci, who had served in the armed forces in Asia, converted his fellow GIs' love for Chinese food into a successful empire of ready-prepared Chinese food for the mass market with the famous Chun King brand of chow mein, whose name sounded like Chongqing (Chungking), China's wartime capital. By the 1950s, sales of frozen and processed Chinese food had increased 70 percent since the war, making it a major national food.[79] In addition to Chinese American pioneers, veterans from Asia served as a less visible, but important, contributor to the transformation of Chinese cuisine from an inferior ethnic food, which the middle-class white family felt culturally or socially embarrassed to embrace, to food associated with metropolitan tastes, global identity, and even fine dining.[80]

SOUNDSCAPE

On September 12, 1945, an American gunboat opened fire on two speeding Japanese PT boats close to the Huangpo shore, marking the navy's triumphal entry into Shanghai. After "our shots broke a tranquil silence," according to future Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., then a young Navy officer lieutenant in the Pacific, "almost as though it had been prearranged, the Chinese multitudes sent up a cheer and shout of welcome that was a roar. Small steam launches sounded their sirens, their craft twisted and turned like happy animals showing their pleasure. Crowds waved and whistled."[81] Other than a few gunshot incidents, the initial American encounter with Japanese troops in North China was mostly marked by silence. As they watched each other "pass by within spitting distance," neither knew "what measures to take," and everyone "ended up simply ignoring 'the existence of the other.'"[82] The "clackety-clack of the swords clanging and the hob-nailed kind of boots" of the Japanese soldiers walking in

78. "Hua cha waixiao sanda zhang'ai" [Three obstacles to China's tea exports], *Shen bao*, April 28, 1946.

79. Liu, *From Canton Restaurant to Panda Express*, 63–65.

80. Madeline Y. Hsu, "From Chop Suey to Mandarin Cuisine: Fine Dining and the Refashioning of Chinese Ethnicity during the Cold War Era," in *Chinese Americans and the Politics of Race and Culture*, eds., Madeline Y. Hsu and Sucheng Chan (Philadelphia, PA, 2008), 173–93.

81. Zumwalt, *On Watch*, 7–8.

82. Simms, "Memoir," 4.

Figure 4: "Marine first division entering Tianjin," 1945, Dewitt Peck personal papers, COLL/3033, USMC.

silence, as well as the heads-down Japanese civilians dressed in disguise fearing revenge from the Chinese, were all markers of defeat.[83]

The heroic sounds of liberation were full of excitement. Behaving "like a bunch of boys on a weekend outing," Marines in north China were "shouting greetings to the curious Chinese" they saw in the train station (see figure 4). None spoke English, but they "kept smiling and saying 'Ding hao very good.'"[84] In Qingdao, the crowds were "yelling and screaming, trying to touch us, and tossing things up to us as a goodwill gesture."[85] On the streets of Shanghai, one old Chinese woman combined "the only three words of English she apparently knew into an inane and joyous litany, 'Hello—thank you.' Hello—thank you,' 'Hello—thank you.' It was almost as though this woman, in her withered crackle, was providing the symbolic lyrics for the stark melody of the multitude."[86]

Once U.S. servicemen settled into their billets and camps in the city, they were immediately exposed to a cacophony of unregulated sound. Outside the gates was a blast of honking, grunting, ranting, moaning, prayers, and happy "jabbering and gibberish."[87] There was the "constant murmuring of countless conversations and the shouts of the camel drivers, peddlers and rickshaw coolies," who "all looked

83. Barrow, USMC.

84. Sledge, *China Marine*, 15–16, 52.

85. Albert Edward Peck (AFC/2001/001/57459), Memoirs (MS 22), Veterans History Project Collection, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

86. Zumwalt, *On Watch*, 10.

87. Barrow, USMC.

and sounded as though time had stood still" since the eighteenth or nineteenth century. Rickshaw pullers yelled at each other in competition over customers, or at passengers to negotiate a price. Vendors, flower girls, and beggars followed rich Americans, repeatedly shouting "GI Joe." A Jewish stallholder yelled "Hot dogs! Hot dogs!" and a suspicious White Russian spoke English "with an accent more Brooklynese than our buddies who were natives of Brooklyn."[88] Overall, Shanghai was home to tens of thousands of Russian refugees after the Russian Revolution and Jews who escaped the Holocaust. These accounts of verbal and nonverbal sound, familiar or unintelligible, a source of fascination and annoyance, formed the rich soundscape of postwar China, mixing the sounds of premodern chaos and cosmopolitan diversity.

The most common and unique auditory experience that a GI had was pidgin English, their lingua franca on the street. A simplified and limited contact language with reduced grammatical structure and vocabulary, pidgin English originally developed in China's southern coasts in the colonial trade. Postwar Chinese cities offered ample opportunities for pidgin lingo. Businessmen in major cities had been serving foreigners for decades, and American soldiers were greeted inside shops by enthusiastic salesmen using fluent yet pidgin expressions. English prep schools became a booming new industry, and new pidgin English textbooks were published. Most learned pidgin English in real life settings, however. Houseboys and workers who had direct and frequent contacts with GIs were among the first to learn. One Marine's houseboy in Beijing who could not speak a single word of English became "that Chink that speaks English with an Alabama accent," due to his friendship with a Southern soldier. Even beggars on the street "who trotted along begging plaintively for a hand out" all started calling out "Cumshaw Joe, Cumshaw Joe."[89] One child thief in Tianjin, a fast learner who always waited outside a Marine station for opportunities to steal, could in three weeks curse "in recognizable English. . . . 'Hey Joe. YOU BOO HOW YOU SON-A-DITCH [Son of a Bitch]!'"[90] As the Chinese civilians learned and utilized their pidgin English, Americans learned the lingo and even developed their own "pidgin Chinese" when doing business with the Chinese. For example, instead of the Chinese standard greeting of "Have you eaten?" you would now "often hear these men in khaki say, '*hao pu hao*?' which literally means 'good, no good,' as their translation of the standard English greeting "How do you do?"[91] In a Chinese satire of "pidgin Chinese," a foreigner translated his Chinese friend's title "*dui zhang*" (Captain) as "*bing tou*" (head of a military unit), but mispronounced it as "*pin tou*," very close in sound, but meaning instead paramour.[92]

88. Sledge, *China Marine*, 22, 51.
89. Sledge, *China Marine*, 26, 45.
90. Simms, "Memoir," 4–5.
91. Tao, "'Hao Pu Hao?'"
92. "Yangjingbang Huayu" [Pidgin Chinese], *Shen bao* (October 20, 1946).

These ad hoc Sino-American communications involved multiple layers of interpretation and misinterpretation from both sides, as shown by the mixed history of "gung ho." Meaning "enthusiastic and eager" in standard English today, the term was introduced into American English in 1942 by Lieutenant Colonel Evans Fordyce Carlson when training a new Marine battalion with Chinese Communist guerrilla-type tactics. He had served as an observer with the Chinese Communist Army during 1937 and 1938. However, "in Chinese this is neither slogan nor a battle cry; it is only a name for an organization," a contraction of the Chinese Industrial Cooperatives Movements (the acronym for *Industrial Cooperation*). In other words, "gung ho" was mistakenly translated by Carlson, and then mistakenly used by American servicemen to greet the Chinese, leading to Chinese shouting "gung ho" back without knowing exactly what it meant. As one of the terms born during the war, a Marine slang, gung ho survived as an Americanism and kept evolving from "work together," to mean "eager beaver" and "rough indiscipline." But "its several accepted American meanings have no resemblance whatever to the recognized meaning in the original language."[93]

One can only speculate about what the Chinese crowds thought when hearing these "Chinese words." But in these situations, it was body language, gesture, and context that mattered more than the words themselves. To every party, these phrases might all sound like gibberish, but both sides were convinced they were speaking the other's language to show appreciation and friendship. This vocal communication showcased a type of entangled relations in which both groups developed pidgin and introduced new vocabularies into their own. As the two sides pronounced "the same" sounds back and forth, the origins and implications of these phrases remained ambiguous and unsettled. This process differed from a colonial encounter where sound was used to distance the colonizer and the colonized, as in the case of "Cooee," which was adopted and appropriated by Europeans from aboriginal Australian words in the late 1800s to bind the colonialists together.[94] Instead, these pidgin Chinese/English words travelled on a mobius strip-like path, in which it was impossible to locate the beginning or end, and their sounds and meanings continue to evolve in different local contexts.

Beyond the initial greetings of "ding hao" and "gung ho," U.S. soldiers engaged in a more complex level of vocal and cultural exchanges using their limited pidgin to shop in China. The Chinese market, which often lacked clearly marked prices, was filled with constant bargaining. To more sympathetic American participants, both sides walked away satisfied after long and exhausting negotiations, usually over a trivial object, making for a comical story to share that ended with mutual satisfaction. This tale of success was consistent with the new American middlebrow intellectual representations of the era,

93. Albert F Moe, "'Gung Ho,'" *American Speech* 42, no. 1 (1967): 19–30.
94. Paul Carter, *The Sound In-between: Voice, Space, Performance* (Sydney, 1992).

highlighting mutually beneficial exchanges between Americans and Asians "within a system of reciprocity."[95] However, the implicit question of "fair trade" never ceased to haunt American narratives of the China trade. Even the Marines' official guide to China included an instruction on shopping in China: "We Americans, almost alone among the great peoples of this world, feel a little ashamed about bargaining for things we buy," but we need to "get over that feeling in the Orient . . unless you enjoy being stung every time."[96] The suggestion seemed useful for reducing the losses of innocent rich Americans, but there was only a thin line between a cunning merchant who "scrapes and bows, and bows and scrapes—Then throws the hooks into you" and an evil "Chinese con man" who always cheats.[97]

As a result of such ingrained beliefs about Chinese unreliability and deception, justice for Chinese immigrants was rarely achieved in the late nineteenth-century U.S. legal system, especially when facing a white opponent, leaving immigrants with a "Chinaman's chance."[98] Half a century later, in the American trials that took place in China with Chinese victims, Chinese witnesses still often went unheard or misheard. In the infamous 1946 Peking rape case, in which a nineteen-year-old Chinese college student was raped by an intoxicated Marine, a critical misuse of terminology occurred when the Military Police officer on duty that night testified that he did not receive any report of a rape accusation. During the trial, it was discovered that the American lieutenant might have misheard and misinterpreted the Chinese police saying "rape" (*qiang jian*) as "intercourse" (*he jian*), two drastically different descriptions set apart by one modifier.[99] After hearing the defendant's claim that the woman was thought to be a street prostitute, many North China Marines felt the whole thing was just the result of "a language mixup and too much liquor."[100] These hearing patterns show not only the U.S. military's loose discipline and tolerance of sexual misbehavior, but also deep-rooted sociocultural biases and systematic discrimination that directly affected how American soldiers were hearing Chinese speech or talking to Chinese people. What was deemed noise and what was deemed credible information was subject to historical and often biased ears.

INTIMATE TOUCHES AND VIOLENT CONTACTS

Haptic encounters became the most dangerous sensory experience and caused the most significant trouble for Sino–American relations at the time. Despite

95. Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 1–17.

96. U.S. Marine Corps, *A Marine's Guide to North China*, 8.

97. Crouch, *China Sketchbook*, 8; Simms, "Memoir," 18–19.

98. Mae Ngai, *The Chinese Question: The Gold Rushes and Global Politics* (New York, 2021), Ch. 3.

99. William G. Pierson case, 81–85, Box 4463, General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, U.S. National Archives and Record Administration, College Park, Maryland.

100. "Shen Chong Case II," 019, 020-050204-0002, Academia Historica Archives, Taipei, Taiwan.

the fears over Chinese foulness and diseases, physical contact between American servicemen and Chinese civilians remained common. Rather than living in separate camp towns, the majority of the troops were located in cities and engaged in extensive material, bodily, and symbolic interactions with the Chinese. Sexual relations quickly developed into the most sensitive issue.[101] Conservatives in China were alarmed by the comparatively casual American courtship rituals and attacked the so-called Jeep girls for fraternizing with GIs, labelling them a national humiliation (see figure 5). In reality, Chinese city girls had consumed U.S. goods and culture for decades. Middle- and upper-class women now met uniformed American men at social events organized by the government, the local YMCA, or the U.S. military, as well as in movie theaters, dance clubs, and roller-skating rinks. These Allied heroes with access to U.S. dollars and goods became even more appealing during a time of high inflation. To ease potential sociocultural conflicts, the Chinese government issued a list of instructions to local governments, including that the Chinese "should not make a fuss about Americans dancing with Chinese women, a common practice for them, and the act should not be seen as promiscuous."[102] Although China's official ideology on gender relations remained conservative for decades, the desire to make the U.S. troops "feel at home" created an urgent need to educate its people on American customs, especially those connected to the sense of tactility.

With few exceptions, marriage between American servicemen and Chinese women remained limited to Chinese American veterans due to the miscegenation laws in many U.S. states and the complex procedures for those who chose this difficult path. But members of all ranks of the military engaged in sexual relations with women in China. As in occupied Japan and Korea, American soldiers in China took prostitution for granted and made only halfhearted efforts to contain venereal disease. Regulations concerning prostitutes were rarely enforced. In the war-torn country, which was filled with refugees and prostitutes, brothels quickly became popular sites for soldiers with ample liberty and attractive pay. For example, Suzhou Hutong in downtown Beijing had been a prospering district for international whorehouses, with a history dating back to the late Qing era; it now became "a heaven for the 'Allies,'" employing many white Russian, Japanese, and Korean women, as well as an increasing number of Chinese women who were rural war refugees.[103] In Tianjin, Marines who stayed in the old French

101. For a more comprehensive discussion of American soldiers' actual and perceived sexual relations with a variety of Chinese women, including prostitutes, café waitresses, entertainers, and elite women, see Chunmei Du, "Jeep Girls and American GIs: Gendered Nationalism in Post-World War II China," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 81, no. 2 (2022): 341–363.

102. Guomin zhengfu, *Jiaqiang ZhongMei junmin ganqing xuanchuan gangyao* [Propaganda outlines for strengthening relations between Chinese people and American soldiers] (1945), 5.

103. Guo Gen, "Beiping sannian: Cong cansheng dao jiefang de yiduan lücheng" [Three years in Beijing: Journey from a pyrrhic victory to liberation], in *Guo Gen wenlu*, edited by San Mu (Taiyuan, Shanxi: Sanjin Publisher, 2013), 95–97.

Figure 5: Roy Rostad photos and narratives, USMC.

barracks were trucked into the city during liberty, and one young soldier from Chicago was shocked to see an eleven-story "den of inquiry, a block long and wide," a city within itself that "had everything over and above the girls."[104]

When it came to haptic protocols concerning Chinese women, the U.S. military had conflicting messages for its soldiers: they were memorable Warmie dolls, on the one hand, and dangerous carriers of disease with hidden agendas, on the other. Military guides gave timely warnings about the various diseases,

104. Roy Rostad photos and narratives, COLL/1399, 6–7, USMC.

conveniently dubbed "Chinese Rot" and "Chinese Crud," that could not be cured by Western medicine, and advised GI Joe to stay away from the traditional solaces of "wine and women," for both were "loaded."[105] These instructions also told young GIs to distinguish between "the average Chinese girl," who "will be insulted if you touch her, or will take you more seriously than you probably want to be taken," and "Chinese girls in cabarets and places of amusement who may be used to free and easy ways."[106] These ambiguous portraits also applied to the Chinese people in general: they were both allies in arms who shared many traits, and others who had very different bodies, diseases, and physical expressions. For example, "they do not like to be touched. They don't like to be slapped on the back, or even to shake hands," except for some of the "modern ones."[107]

In reality, the purported respect for Chinese women and for Allied relations often fell flat due to excessive alcohol use, cultural arrogance, racial discrimination, and, ultimately, a hypermasculine military culture that enabled systematic tolerance of sexual misbehavior. One GI described the common attitude: "We put our arms around the girls' shoulders, thinking, as their attitude implied, that they were just friendly street girls," until the girls' crying brought a group of passersby and police who came to the rescue.[108] Chinese newspapers reported incidents of sexual violence toward women from all walks of life: two working-class girls in Shanghai barely escaped assault by two GIs and one sailor who stabbed local police with knives; an official's wife in Nanjing was raped outdoors and injured after watching a night show; and a factory worker in Qingdao was gang-raped and pushed down a hill.[109] Most of these cases did not make it to an American court-martial and only a thin paper trail was left in local police records. One exception was the aforementioned Peking rape case that made local and international headlines. On Christmas Eve, 1946, nineteen-year-old college student Shen Chong suffered a traumatic three-hour ordeal on a frozen field in downtown Beijing when she was raped by intoxicated Corporal William Gaither Pierson, assisted by Private Warren Pritchard. Despite the Chinese witnesses' affirmative testimonies, Pierson was eventually exonerated due to a "lack of evidence."[110]

Another major form of violent contact involved physical abuse. When surrounded by Chinese crowds, unarmed GIs on liberty often felt unsafe, alarmed,

105. Simms, "Memoir," 7; U.S. Marine Corps, *A Marine's Guide to North China*, 13.

106. U.S. Army Service Forces, *A Pocket Guide to China*, 15.

107. U.S. Army Service Forces, *A Pocket Guide to China*, 4–8, 42.

108. "Guanyu Meijun xujiu ouda cheliangzhaohuo deng wenti de baogao" [Reports on the misbehaviors of American soldiers including intoxication, battery, and traffic accidents], 1945, Q1-6-416, SC0025, Shanghai Municipal Archive (SMA).

109. See Du, "Jeep Girls and American GIs."

110. See James A. Cook, "Penetration and Neocolonialism: The Shen Chong Rape Case and the Anti-American Student Movement of 1946–47," *Republican China* 22, no.1 (1996): 65–97; Robert Shaffer, "A Rape in Beijing, December 1946: GIs, Nationalist Protests, and U.S. Foreign Policy," *Pacific Historical Review* 69, no.1 (2000): 31–64.

and even threatened. This was not only because of the diseases the Chinese were supposed to carry, but also because of the GIs' belief that the Chinese formed dangerous mobs that tried to fool people with dishonest business practices, took advantage of foreigners' lack of local knowledge, and intimidated them into submission. In particular, U.S. soldiers viewed Chinese rickshaw men both with sympathy, as exotic "beasts of burden," and with alarm, as a distinctive sociological group that required "special talents to tame."[111] Recognizing these ingrained racist beliefs helps us to better understand why rickshaw pullers became victims of some of the deadliest crimes. On September 22, 1946, U.S. sailor Edward Roderick, together with a Spanish sailor from an American ship, got into a fare dispute with a Shanghai rickshaw puller outside a club. Surrounded by a group of pullers and pedicab riders, he hit puller Zang Yaocheng on the head, sending him into a coma. Zang was diagnosed with a concussion and died the following morning (see figure 6). A little over six months later, a Qingdao rickshaw puller was killed in a similar situation. After refusing to pay the agreed fare upon arrival at a club, Petro Abarra, a U.S. Navy Steward's Mate Second Class, was surrounded by several dozen rickshaw pullers who were waiting for customers at the site. Abarra took out a pocket knife and stabbed a bystander puller named Su Mingcheng in the thigh. Su later collapsed and was pronounced dead at the scene.[112]

As an extension of the physical violence toward Chinese bodies, and often, in avoidance of direct engagements with them, American soldiers fired at Chinese civilians who were suspected of theft and black-market dealing of U.S. military goods. To protect American properties against rampant theft, firing orders were issued by local commanders if the suspects failed to halt after being ordered so. One thief in Shanghai was shot dead for stealing three packages of sugar from a former Japanese warehouse.[113] In Qingdao, a group of children who had gone to an American ship to steal were chased into a sewer by armed soldiers, whose shots ended up killing one of the children.[114] In Beijing, Marine Military Police fired two shots while apprehending a college student who was wearing American uniform pants that he had purchased on the black market. One bullet struck his left leg.[115] Even the innocent were in danger. An American sentry in Tianjin fired a shot at a Chinese patrolling policeman who was mistaken in the dark for a thief. Afterwards, as the policeman ran away in

111. Mark Wilkinson, "American Military Misconduct in Shanghai and the Chinese Civil War: The Case of Zang Dayaozi," *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 17, no. 2 (2010): 146–73.

112. See Wilkinson, "American Military Misconduct in Shanghai and the Chinese Civil War."

113. "Shanghai de wuye youmin" [Shanghai's vagabonds], 1947, Q131-5-1962, SMA.

114. "Guanyu Zhongguo xiaohai bei Meibing jibi shiyi de qiancheng [Memo about Chinese children being shot dead by American soldiers], 1946, B0033/001/00300/0175, Qingdao Municipal Archive, Qingdao, China.

115. "Guanyu Meixianbing qiangshang Zhongguo xueshengde chengwen" [Memo about an American M.P. firing at and injuring a Chinese student], 1946, J001-001-00541, BMA.

Figure 6: Zhuang Lang, drawing by Ding Hao, *Meijun zai Zhongguo de baoxing* (Atrocities of American Troops in China) (Shanghai: Dadong shuju, 1951), ch. 5, Hunter Collection, Center for Research Libraries, Chicago, Illinois.

fear, a second bullet hit him in the shoulder.[116] Even Omar T. Pfeiffer, commanding general of the Fleet Marine Force, West Pacific, admitted that his halt or shoot order resulted in "almost nightly killings because of our high velocity and power weapons." But as he put it, "that was the only way that I knew could possibly cope with the situation."[117] The U.S. military's flawed policy and biased system provided a legal shield for the GIs' quick resort to excessive violence towards Chinese civilians.

Touch, sensual or violent, remained the most common and treacherous experience in everyday encounters. Therefore, limits had to be enforced, as the military prescribed and policed boundaries of the "American body." Sharp distinctions were drawn between "China stench" and "Oriental diseases," on the one hand, and American civilization, on the other, through sanitation measures and disinfectant sprayed on Chinese places and bodies, in-bound and outbound markers for local sites, and the barbed wire-topped walls of military compounds that were patrolled by armed sentries who fired at trespassers. It might not surprise us that these violent incidents led to strong anti-American sentiment and sometimes nationwide protests in China. After the killing of rickshaw puller Zang Yaocheng and the rape of Shen Chong, tens of thousands of demonstrators outside U.S. military compounds shouted anti-American slogans such as "Go Home—American devils, beasts, and drunken soldiers!" and demanded not only the punishment of the criminal but also the complete

116. "Meijun qiangsha ji qiche zhuangshang an" [Cases of American shootings and car accidents], 1947, J0009-1-000107, TMA.

117. Omar T. Pfeiffer, oral history transcript, April 1974, 319–321, USMC.

withdrawal of the U.S. military from China.[118] Occasionally, some of the Marines, who were ordered to stay within their billets to avoid physical confrontation, shouted back, "I want to go home," frustrated at being denied their overdue return home from a war that had long ended.

MAKE SENSE OF THE SENSES

American soldiers were problematic agents of the empire. They were first and foremost foreign armed forces performing military missions. They were also tourists, consumers, and cultural diplomats on the ground, there to represent and spread U.S. democracy and values. These conflicting identities, and the ill-defined objectives of the China occupation, created challenges for the American and Chinese governments when handling anti-American sentiments and protests, which were often attributed entirely to Communist propaganda and agitation. Despite the new popular culture and ideology of global integration in the mid-twentieth century, GIs' mental and sensory worlds were still embedded with systematic biases towards the Chinese, sometimes perpetuated by the military itself. Similar to their colonial predecessors, U.S. servicemen in China largely maintained a privileged lifestyle separate from Chinese society. Orientalist views preconditioned GIs' sensory experiences, shaping how they saw, smelled, tasted, listened to, and touched China; and binary framings dominated their sensory narratives. As in other postwar occupied nations, the senses confirmed and reinforced existing sociocultural prejudices, and helped to maintain inherent inequalities based on race, nation, and civilization. But American soldiers also "went native," and many embraced Chinese food, touch, language, and culture. The purported physical, racial, and cultural boundaries were blurred by Chinese servants who washed clothes, cooked, and served; by banquets and parties hosted by governments and organizations; and by elite and professional women who fraternized with foreign enlisted men.

In their daily lives, American servicemen engaged in deeply historical and ideological acts, as when a GI Joe wore a Chinese queue on his head or wore costumes that no Chinese would want; when a Marine pulled a rickshaw with the rickshaw boy riding in it, while saying "ding hao" with his thumb up to Chinese passersby; and when an officer spent considerable time and energy negotiating with a street vendor over a cheap water glass. It was to experience China in a microcosm through sensory embodiment. They were mimicking "Chineseness," enacting scenes that were embedded in racial imagination, cultural fantasy, and geopolitical hierarchy. These transactions did not simply follow the logic of economics or even of the market. Instead, the contested values of these objects and experiences lay in both the material and the symbolic worlds, within which personal and national dignities were crucial measurements. As one insightful officer reflected on whether it was worth going to "a

118. See Du, "Jeep Girls and American GIs."

lot of trouble in buying a 10c glass," he concluded: "But what the heck, I had bargained and my self-esteem had been increased by my brilliant dickering."[119] If these exchanges indeed were expressions of cultural diversity in an era of U.S. expansion and confirmed Americans' imaginary vision of global integration, their aim was to integrate China into a still-hierarchical world full of inequalities.

In China, the official tale of postwar Sino–American reciprocity continued to be questioned, as anti-American movements promoted by the Communists attracted a wide range of supporters within Chinese society in the late 1940s. Upon entering the Korean War, the Chinese Communist Party organized a fierce mass mobilization campaign, in which "American atrocities in China" were again exploited in a propaganda war that featured the beating, raping, and killing of Chinese civilians by GIs as explicit expressions of U.S. imperialism in the world. Some of these incidents continued to be taught in school textbooks until the 1980s, ensuring their longevity in the national memory. In the United States, China was embodied, enacted, and brought home via souvenirs, photos, spouses, and maids, as well as tastes, vocabularies, tales, aesthetics, and identities that became part of the U.S. postwar sociocultural fabric. Veterans of China would join the larger body of troops who served in Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and other areas in the region, and together they helped to reshape American identities in the new age of global expansion. Their experiences remind us that military missions should also be understood as sensory encounters, often with longer-lasting and more significant legacies than the pursuit of immediate strategic objectives.

119. Simms, "Memoir," 19–20.