Good wars are hard to find, but satisfying postwar scenarios are even scarcer. Euphoria and celebration give way to deep exhaustion, leaving the cleanup, organization, and administration of a new state to the less capable aftermath. Liberation becomes occupation, soldiers grow bored, and victory’s horrible hangover sets in. Foes -- those not hanged, at least -- recede into a hundred hostile factions, entering the void of centralization once monopolized by the state. Wartime allies parlay postwar aid into advantage in civil conflict. Where one war appears to have ended, another is spawned.

World War II, fought on the basis of solid anti-fascism and the liberation of populations from tyranny, gave way in Asia to a confused situation wherein the United States actively reconstructed its enemies and alienated its friends. While this turn of events led in part to Japan’s eventual economic success and its thriving as a model “occupied country,” the romanticism associated with the American occupation of Japan (1945-1952) never reached the other Northeast Asian countries policed by U.S. troops in the postwar years. The U.S. military occupation of South Korea from 1945-1948 initially treated the Koreans worse than the Japanese, and the Syngman Rhee regime was a deeply corrupt and nominally democratic ally whose alternating bellicosity and weakness were exposed during the Korean War (1950-1953). Anti-Americanism consequently mushroomed in South Korea, stimulated by the excesses of U.S. military aid to the corrupt South Korean dictatorship. In China, where the United States had enjoyed high prestige during World War II, the postwar situation was even more complex.

In the wake of World War II, more than 54,000 American troops poured into Chinese cities to disarm Japanese soldiers, fill a power vacuum, and ease the transition from dictatorship to democracy (Shaw, 1968; Pepper, 1999; Westad, 2003; Yang, 1998). In cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, American soldiers interacted closely with the Chinese people, in whose service they aided in repatriating nearly two million of China’s former enemies, the Japanese. With the exit of the Japanese military from China in mid-1946, however, American soldiers who had expected to go home (or at least back to the relative comfort of immense garrisons in Japan) found themselves with a new and more daunting mission of policing a civil war.

In 1946, China’s two hostile armed political parties resumed their blood feud, with Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist Party holding the upper hand against Mao Zedong’s insurgent and expanding Chinese Communist Party. Augmented
by vast stocks of surplus Soviet, American, and Japanese weaponry, and rarely lacking manpower, both sides maneuvered through the maze of fighting and negotiating. To staunch this ill-defined and growing civil war, General George C. Marshall was sent to exercise his powers of meditation, ultimately futilely, in service of President Truman’s vision of a peaceful and democratic China. Marshall’s words from the period are laden with the difficulty of pursuing such a policy in China. “Spread over a tremendous area,” he wrote, U.S. troops were in the midst of “all the bitterness and feuds and misunderstandings of such a fratricidal struggle.” China, Marshall wrote in February 1946, had reached “a critical state trembling on the verge of open general war,” where “no one ... understood the meaning and working of a two-party government” (Marshall, 2003:259).

While the United States professed neutrality in this vast conflict of more than six million Chinese troops, in practice the Americans’ World War II-era alliance with Chiang Kai-shek and his National Government endured. The Nationalists were nominally in control of the cities, but such control was ephemeral without the aid, advice, and arms provided by the United States. Plied by the persuasive flattery and scornful reproach of Madame Chiang Kai-shek, the Truman administration gave the Nationalists what they said they needed to beat Mao and “the Reds.” The Sino-American wartime alliance thus devolved into a relationship of utter dependency whereby the many faults of Chiang Kai-shek’s dictatorship became collapsed into critiques of his American military advisors. Corruption, fed by massive U.S. aid and wholly resistant to American oversight, remained an insoluble problem. Arms granted to the Nationalists disappeared, local commanders confiscated aid for personal gain, and apparent allies frequently defected (along with their weaponry) to the rival People’s Liberation Army. Consequently, the Chinese communist force that had begun the civil war with exactly one truck was able to roll into Beijing in January 1949 astride Jeeps made in Detroit and tanks from Lima, Ohio.

In the period from 1945 to 1949, American troops in Nationalist-controlled cities increasingly found their aid rejected by the very population which had been their stalwart wartime allies against Japanese aggression. Anti-American nationalism among the Chinese people, especially students, was on the rise after 1945. The American role in China, rooted in missionary impulses and desires to stabilize China as the anchor of a prosperous and peaceful East Asia, therefore transitioned in Chinese eyes from ally to adversary. While this change mirrored the rise of the Chinese Communist Party after 1945, Chinese intellectuals hardly required Mao’s guidance to analyze American economic and military failings in China. With the declaration of the People’s Republic of China in October 1949 and Chiang Kai-shek’s subsequent flight to exile in Taiwan, the path was prepared for a long and bloody US-China confrontation that would extend into the Korean peninsula in late 1950. Thus the period from
1945 to 1949, when American troops spent four years in Chinese cities at the invitation of the National Government, remain a consequential test case in the politics of occupation, the thorny problems of international alliances, and the growth of anti-American sentiment in East Asia.

With the long-awaited Japanese surrender and the arrival of the postwar, American media outlets painted American troops deployed to foreign lands in 1946 as apostles of morality and democratic values. A *Newsweek* cover of April 22, 1946, depicted a cherubic son of the Midwest, toting a rucksack and brandishing an apple, as if headed to the first day of school. Entitled “Operation Peace: The GI of 1946,” the image spoke to the hoped-for innocence of a fresh generation of recruits that would consolidate the gains of liberty won in the recent war. Perhaps such assessments had Japan, rather than China, as their primary Asian example. In occupied Japan, U.S. Eighth Army cartoonists satirized and gently condoned American patrimony over the Japanese people. Along with such harmless portrayals of American troops, “Vision after vision of cherry-blossom Japan, receptive Japanese women, and grateful, smiling Japanese children in postwar Hollywood films ... helped Americans accommodate a more tolerant view of the Japanese” (Shibusawa, 2006:259). That the American occupation itself was actively censoring any hint of Japanese dissent made such portrayals all the more assured. Whatever its origins, the validation lavished by the Japanese upon their American occupiers existed in a yin-yang relationship with China’s violent disintegration and increasingly acerbic public attitude toward American power. If Japan had become a willing geisha for the United States, China was transforming into a surly and divorce-prone spouse (Cathcart, 2005).

The Chinese image of American troops after 1945 had little in common with Japan’s professed naïveté and fascination with U.S. troops in the same period. No longer willing to play the pliant junior partner in the aftermath of eight long years of Japanese occupation (1937-1945), the Chinese were extremely sensitive to any suggestion that the U.S. and China were less than equal. That the United States had failed to attack Japan and appeared to dawdle its thumbs for four years as China suffered under Japanese bombs from 1937-1941 was also not lost upon Chinese postwar observers, whose apprehensions focused on the increasingly warm US-Japan relationship (Schaller, 1985; Lutze, 1998). American professions of impartiality in the emerging Chinese civil war were also problematic. Populations of urbane and news-reading Chinese rapidly grasped U.S. favoritism toward Chiang Kai-shek’s increasingly corrupt National Government. While the alternative, Mao Zedong’s rural radicalism, remained safely obscured by the Party’s opposition status, Nationalist mistakes enabled by U.S. aid drove many moderates into the arms of the CCP.

In the four years from 1945 to 1949, American troops were a dominant feature in cities across China, including Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, and
Chongqing. To be sure, American businessmen, missionaries, and relief workers also flooded into China after the war, but to Chinese citizens the face of the U.S. was predominantly military. The arrival of American troops in Chinese port cities in October 1945 had, at the time, been welcomed by observers eager to see the departure of the unrepentant Japanese army from their soil (Gillin, 1983). However, the Chinese urban population quickly turned against the American veterans of Okinawa, along with green recruits from the American Midwest, because their actions were seen as disrespectful of China (Sledge, 2002). At the local level, the Americans troops flaunted their extraterritorial privileges and transgressed China’s sexual mores, unconsciously stirring up memories of the humiliating foreign influences brought to China after successive defeats in the Opium Wars of the 19th Century. Ultimately, the American troops were seen as a harmful extension of years of foreign influence in China, and even after their return to the United States in 1949, Mao Zedong, the Chinese Communists, and propagandists in People’s Republic of China leaned heavily upon depictions of “the atrocities of American troops” to mobilize anti-American sentiments during the Korean War.

Analyzing Chinese comic art from the period of 1945-1950 can provide an important means of understanding how the image of the United States can be transformed into potent political propaganda. More to the point, the images show how a few “isolated incidents” of misconduct by American troops can reverberate strongly through societies policed by American soldiers. This point becomes stunningly clear in the diaries of Derk Bodde, a student of ancient China and citizen of the United States. As a Fulbright scholar for nearly two years in Beijing studying Chinese philosophy, Bodde chronicled the massive pivot from Nationalist to Communist control in Beijing. Evidencing repeated and sustained contact with various generations of Chinese intellectuals, Bodde’s *Peking Diary* noted the complexity of Chinese attitudes toward the United States (Bodde, 1950). These attitudes were the focus also of American missionaries involved in covert anti-CCP activities coordinated by the American consulate and British embassy in Beijing (Rickett, 1957:35-36, 40-42). By late 1949, Chinese intellectuals had consequently become wholly disillusioned with the United States and permissive to dealing with the USSR. However, disillusionment with U.S. implies that “illusions” were, at one time at least, held by the critical party.

Among the urban Chinese elites who lived in Nationalist cities from 1945-1949, an urbane and cosmopolitan outlook prevailed. To the youth in the affluent cities, particularly those who enjoyed their parents’ mercantilism and took their vacations abroad, American culture was possessed of inherent attractions wholly separate from the U.S. regiments policing the streets. These attractions were not entirely new, as the World War II hub city of Chongqing had been rife with U.S. culture effectively propagated by the well-endowed Office of War Information (Fairbank, 1976). During the war with Japan, the

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capitol-in-exile in Chongqing had been rife with examples of Chinese youth fully taken in by the attractions of American music, movies, and magazines (Chennault, 1949). In post-Japanese occupation cities that looked to supplant reliance on Japan for such goods as movies, fashion styles, and toothbrushes, U.S. soldiers and film companies like 20th Century Fox played an important role. After the war and the conferral of cities from Japan back to China’s hand, America’s cultural might was acknowledged in movie houses, jazz clubs, and record stores in big cities like Shanghai (Cathcart, 2006). Fig. 1, a parody of young Shanghaiese enamored of American actors like Ronald Reagan, indicates the enmeshment of Chinese youth in American popular culture.

Fig. 1. “American Culture,” from Before and After Shanghai’s Liberation, 1949 (courtesy Edward Hunter Collection of Mass Education Materials, Center for Research Libraries, Chicago, Illinois).

Featuring a little English, the poster admired by the impressionable Shanghaiese youth advertises “Today’s Premier Movies/Hollywood Productions” and the largest characters near the admiring teen read “Theater.” Apart from the image, the rhymed couplets underneath the cartoon indicate the proper attitude that good Chinese patriots, under the banner of the Chinese Communist Party, are to take toward such media:

There once were many hoodlums,  
That all studied the ways of foreign thugs,  
Following the arch-crimes of American films,  
Running amok, making scenes of evil.

Reading the caption, it becomes clear that the image, for all its playfulness, embraces a stable of signifiers indicative of U.S. excess. Cowboys, kissing, cops and robbers, cigars and strip shows are all cited as evidence of American
culture. Also littering the frame are a handful of images indicating the muted violence of U.S. culture, including knives and an evil toothy mask -- the latter image mirroring contemporary North Korean cartoonists' portrayal of a duplicitous and malevolent United States in East Asia (U.S. National Archives, Captured North Korean Materials; New York Public Library, Propaganda Collection). The power of U.S.-sponsored imagery and the complexity of the cartoonists' appeal are evident in the near-full emulation of the Shanghai youth of the American movie poster. Fig. 1 was, then, a broad critique of both U.S. culture and its Chinese imitators.

Fig. 2. “Jeep Girls,” *Shanghai Magazine*, (Shanghai: 1946) No. 2, front cover. (Courtesy Shanghai Municipal Library).
The attractions and perils of Westernization are reflected with greater ambivalence in Fig. 2, focusing on gender and the sexual relations between American men and Chinese women. The context, however, is rather different from that of Fig. 1, as Fig. 2 adorned the cover of a popular oversized postwar magazine, whose stylized title, Shanghai, indicates the geographical center of the burgeoning postwar market for magazines. Fig. 2 focuses upon a Chinese woman clutching to the arm of her military man. Donning wedged shoes, she proudly displays her Westernization via an oversized clutch and Lana Turner-esque sunglasses -- accessories far removed from what might be regarded as stereotypical Chinese attire. The tall, well-built American does not appear as an amoral element, as the concept of “ownership” present in this cartoon might well favor the woman: the American soldier is simply another of her possessions.

Indicating the giddiness of the early postwar, the car in the background of Fig. 2 is full of wild and well-heeled Chinese women cavorting with American troops. These ladies consequently came to be known in postwar cities, somewhat derisively, as “jeep girls.” While the “jeep girls” only reinforced Chinese views of the American soldiers as a source of corrupting debauchery, Fig. 2 does not necessarily promote such a view. The car cruises along next to a fluffy dog, the canine being regarded as a sure sign of wealth in crowded Shanghai, or, perhaps, a twin symbol of blind obedience and raw sexual libido. As a whole, however, the image appears to connote that Chinese might indeed profit from intercourse with the clean and wealthy Americans.

If Fig. 2 subtly pokes fun at the ostentatious and Western-oriented materialism of the “jeep girls,” Fig. 3 tastes more pungently of anti-Americanism. The image by Zhang Ding, an acknowledged master of the cartoon craft, captures a specific moment of chaos in Shanghai attributed chiefly to the American soldiers’ presence (Hung, 1994). Rather than a self-possessed and urbane portrayal of the “jeep girl” seen in Fig. 2, in Zhang’s sketch the young woman appears as a horrified and unwilling participant in the display of American power. She is a white and delicate counterpoint to the American soldier in whose jeep she rides and in whose paw she is enveloped. Averting her eyes from the arrogant Americans, her gaze is fixed upon a rickshaw puller who has been run over in the American’s victorious rush. The sharp profile of the jeep’s driver highlights his large foreign nose, while the American flag flying from the front of the jeep is juxtaposed with the torn saucer-hat of the dead rickshaw puller. In the back seat, the largest American depicted in the cartoon, unlike Fig. 2, possesses no dignity. He is fat, apparently drunk, and patently offensive. In the swiftly-sketched background, Americans run wild, shooting into the airplane-filled skies, robbing wealthy civilians, and assaulting a Chinese traffic cop who has dropped his club in fear. Shanghai’s forest of skyscrapers and many technological advantages force an emaciated rickshaw driver to take flight, highlighting the plight of the working class when
confronted with the full montage of American imperialism. **Fig. 3** also functions as a graphic indictment of Nationalist power in the cities, indicating that the alleged abuses of American imperialism can never be checked by such a corrupt Chinese regime. When incidents involving the military and the Chinese public were brought to the authorities’ attention, it was evident that Chiang Kai-shek’s National Government could exert very little control over how the Americans behaved in their country. This renewed exercise of extraterritoriality in the country of China caused an anti-foreign, anti-American feeling to stir.

![Image of Fig. 3: Zhang Ding, “Americans Run Amok in Shanghai,” Northeast Pictorial, 1946 (courtesy Shanghai Municipal Library).](image)

Fig. 4 remarks upon the similar theme of American disregard for Chinese laws and lives. Upon their arrival in Shanghai in 1945, American military officials had insisted that the city move away from its Japan-influenced practice of driving on the left side of the road. Albert Wedemeyer, a U.S. Commander and Chiang Kai-shek’s Chief of Staff, described the “thrilling experience of standing on the balcony of my tower apartment in the Cathay Hotel in Shanghai to watch the traffic at midnight change over to move along the right side of the road” (Wedemeyer, 1958:354-356). In Shanghai, such changes, along with an influx of U.S. vehicles, led to a situation in which American jeeps alone accounted for 400 accidents between September 1945 and January 1946. These endemic accidents, along with incidents of public drunkenness and rape,

Fig. 4 extends upon the theme of uncaring American drivers by critiquing the reckless behavior of the American military personnel, portraying an immense military vehicle plowing over rickshaw and bystanders. Unlike Fig. 3, the Chinese depicted in Fig. 4 are all well-dressed, “civilized” business people and shopkeepers. The surrounding area is well-groomed, and power lines attest to China’s modernization. However, the American, swallowed in the hubris of his immense truck, is portrayed as a callous, brutal element. The pedestrian being ground beneath the tires of the truck spills several liters of blood in illustration of what Chinese viewed as an American lack of concern given for Chinese life and rights. The cartoon places especially disparaging emphasis on the fact that even Westernized, modern Chinese are drowning in the American tide of abuse.

![Fig. 4. “Panic in the Streets,” Atrocities of American Troops in Pictures, Shanghai, 1950 (Hunter Collection).](image)

Images of American brutality, however, were not limited to truck and jeep drivers. In the carousing nightlife of U.S. soldiers on leave in China’s ports, bars and clubs were popular destinations. Lacking in Chinese language skills and eager to find sex partners, American troops fueled the growth of postwar red light districts in Beijing and Shanghai while contracting and spreading venereal disease (Sledge, 2002). Rickshaw pullers thus did a lucrative business shuffling drunk, soon-to-be-drunk, or merely curious U.S. soldiers between base and bar (Rittenberg, 2001:39-42). Given the underlying tensions produced by alcohol, it is perhaps not surprising that disagreements broke out between rickshaw men and flushed U.S. troops. Military personnel would often act out of turn and become enraged with the rickshaw pullers, inflicting physical abuse (Zhang, 2003:41). The death of several rickshaw pullers in 1946 spread stories through the cities of American injustice, depicted in
Fig. 4. Though taken from a communist publication entitled *This Is America*, the incidents had been well known long before CCP took over cities in Spring 1949, showing how the Party aimed to reflect popular sentiment. Such images were juxtaposed by the CCP with halcyon portrayals of China’s Soviet allies, scrubbed to a glowing sheen for public consumption.

![Image](image1.png)

Fig. 5. “Dance Hall,” *Atrocities of American Troops in Pictures*, Shanghai, 1950 (Hunter Collection).

*Fig. 5* provides for Chinese readers a close-up portrayal of the relationship of the American navy to the common Chinese citizen, at least according to Chinese Communist Party artists in 1950. Big nosed and belligerent, the two drunk, raging, and nearly identical Americans pictured in *Fig. 5* are brutalizing a presumably innocent rickshaw driver outside of a “Music Hall and Dance Club.” Contrasts are drawn in this image between the types of clothing worn by well-heeled Americans and the Chinese rickshaw driver. A similar technique had been employed by Zhang Ding with far more masterful strokes in *Fig. 3*, articulating the poverty of the Chinese and the injustice of American action by portraying the rickshaw puller without shoes. The American soldiers, with their leather shoes and hands full of booze, cheat the driver out of his fare, functioning as a type of shorthand for Chinese resentment at the imbalance of power and wealth between the two countries.

The dynamics of power in the Sino-U.S. relationship became even more imbalanced and tense with the emergence of the Chinese Communist Party in 1949 as the dominant political force on the mainland. With the victory over the Nationalists and the flight of Chiang Kai-shek’s government to Taiwan, Mao paradoxically grew more paranoid about, and vigilant toward, a full-scale American intervention in China. After drawing down to force levels of 20,000 in 1948, most of the final 5,000 American troops in China departed in 1949; however, Marines continued to protect American consulates in many Chinese cities, and CIA operatives were very active in Tibet and along the Burmese...
Mao, facing a ravaged economy and confronting the full panoply of old social ills -- hunger and drug addiction being but two -- worried that the United States would fall upon China at this vulnerable time, reprising Allied intervention against the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia from 1917-1921. So convinced was Mao of American ill intent toward the new People's Republic of China that almost immediately after the declaration of the state on Oct. 1, 1949, he both devoured and appeared to believe intelligence reports about American conspiracies to roll back the revolution from U.S. bases in Japan. Deep suspicions among the CCP leadership toward the United States therefore dominated China's international outlook after 1949 and pervaded propaganda efforts to mobilize the masses.

Within the context of these efforts, the CCP sought to use the past presence of American soldiers in China to justify strict vigilance within the general population. To do so, the CCP could not help but draw upon the legacy of even older events. Fig. 6 explicitly evokes the past "century of humiliation," reminding viewers of the tradition of foreign treaty rights in China dating back to the Opium War and the 1842 Treaty of Nanking.

Fig. 6 portrays a United States soldier partaking in those rights by striding into China's port cities, unopposed by any strong central government and backed by arsenals of foreign firepower. This gigantic and faceless foreigner marches toward skyscraper-rich Shanghai, on the Woosong River, a tributary to the Yangtze River, the artery of inland commerce central to Nationalist power and, until 1949, the site of foreign-dominated commerce that had flowed out of the Treaty of Nanking. The image strongly implied that the Americans regarded themselves as invincible, unwilling to acknowledge China's status as an independent nation, freed by the end of World War II (Pickowicz, 2000). Published in 1950, Fig. 6 also reflects the CCP's need to
mobilize the Chinese people for another American influx of armed power into Korea.

For the CCP, the presence of U.S. servicemen in China served as shorthand for the era of national humiliation at the hands of militarily stronger western powers. The greatest symbol of national humiliation wrought by American troops was the rape of a Chinese college student, Shen Chong, by William Pierson, a U.S. marine in Beijing, on Dec. 25, 1946. The rape case captured great public attention in Chinese newspapers through 1947 and became perhaps the most iconic (and damaging) example of how the Chinese public turned against the U.S. during the Chinese civil war. The case rapidly mobilized Beijing University students who protested the victim’s rape on their campus drill field, an atrocity which occurred after the victim had watched no less a film than “The Spirit of Nationalism.” When the defendant was finally found guilty in a U.S. military court on only one of the five charges in the Shen Chong case, the verdict as well as the entire process strongly displeased Chinese observers (Zhang, 2003:101).

Because of the sensitive subject matter, cartoons dealing with the Shen Chong rape case had to tread carefully, and especially so after 1949, when the CCP imposed strict sanctions on images that could be considered pornographic. Fig. 7 therefore attempts to show the beginning of the rape, but maintains its focus on the “not guilty” verdict for the rapist. Meanwhile the Chinese must simply remain submissive to overbearing American occupation. The Chinese are powerless in enforcing the laws of their own country.

Fig. 7. “America is ‘Not Guilty’ of Raping Shen Chong,” Atrocities of American Troops in Pictures, Shanghai, 1950 (Hunter Collection).
In Fig. 7, an American military official links fascist traits with Confucian legal practice, lording over a Nationalist official and brandishing a “Not Guilty” verdict for Pierson. The Chinese official submits to the verdict without protest, implying his complicity in Shen Chong’s rape. The Nationalist official bows, affirming the verdict by saying “Yes! Yes!” but he also bows so as to avert his eyes from the atrocity. (He resembles the parodies of the hapless Japanese emperor Hirohito, whose awkward bows and declarations of “Ah so?” would have been well known to media-savvy Chinese readers). To the artist and his intended audience, the Shen Chong rape was precisely the result of U.S. aid to China: dominance, rape, and shame. The cartoon implies that absent a strong central government, the Chinese nation may be, like Shen Chong, held down against its will and subject to the predatory impulses of the devilish foreigners.

The Shen Chong incident in China served to sully the American image and galvanize moderate public opinion against the United States. The mass public media of political cartoons served as a vehicle in which American soldiers were demonized in an effort to shock the viewer. American soldiers were thus the target of a welter of criticisms in cartoons and news reports creating a broad current of anti-American sentiment. As one Chinese intellectual stated (Bodde, 1950), the vehement Chinese response to Shen Chong’s rape by an American soldier proved that “one hundred years of friendship can be wiped out in a single day.”

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