

**THE CHINESE & HONG KONG DIASPORAS  
IN THE  
US-CHINA CONFLICT**

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# A Potential Hot-button Issue Seen From Historical Perspectives

# SCHEME

- The Stage & Main Actors:
  - The Chinese & Hong Kong Diasporas
  - China
  - The US
- Ch-US Tension Driven by Long-historical Ch Expansionism
- US Response Informed By Cold War & Pearl Harbor
  - Soviet Infiltration & McCarthyism
  - Internment Of Enemy-related Ethnic Groups
- Likely Scenario : A Limited China-US Military Conflict
  - Diaspora Impact Response

# DIASPORAS

- Diaspora formation :
  - push from internal bad factors
  - push from neighboring bad factors
  - pull from external good factors

⇒ diaspora size a good proxy of cumulative bad / good factors
- Diasporan politics :
  - directly affected by home politics (*Wang 1993*)
- Hong Kong Since 2017:
  - became a *per se* push factor for the first time in its history

# THE CHINESE DIASPORA : c. 2017

- Numbers:

ethnic Ch: **46 - 60 m** (43 m ex TW, HK, MC; OCAC, *Taiwan 2014*)  
23 m ([\*Wang 王赓武 1993\*](#)) -- doubled in 30 years

China-born: **10 m** (2.4 m US, 0.8 m CA; *USCB 2019*)

- Comparisons:

Jewish Diaspora -- 18 m  $\approx$   $\frac{1}{3}$  size of Ch Diaspora

ethnic Ch / Jp among USAA -- 3.5 times ([\*Pew Research 2021\*](#))

- Strong Ch Transnationalism: Split Loyalty

could lead to strong repression in a China-US Military Conflict

# THE HONG KONG DIASPORA (1)

## Hong Kong's Role in The Two Diasporas:

- a. in Ch Diaspora -- as pull factor & transit pt since ancient times,
  - economic refuge & stepping stone for ordinary Chinese
  - political refuge and safe passage for Ch dissidents and losers
  
- b. in Hk Diaspora -- since 2017 a **push factor** akin to WW2 Jp Occupation
  - ⇒ Hk gov't now seen by many locals as another foreign occupation regime  
外來政權

# THE HONG KONG DIASPORA (2)

- Before NSL 2020 :

  - 1 m members approx. (*various sources*)

  - low-level continual outflow & occasional strong surges

  - differentiated but integral part of Ch D w/ internal conflicts (normal)

- Since NSL 2020 :

  - quantitative - unprecedentedly strong surge (e.g. could triple in UK)

  - qualitative - emergence of **a separate Hk D which rejects Ch identity**

    - (cf. *Wang 1993*)

- Constituency of The New Hk Diaspora:

  - exiles (unprecedented)

  - new voluntary departees

  - converts from original Hk portion of Ch D

# THE COUNTRIES

- China : Proactive New Challenger
- US : Reactive Incumbent Power
- “Stackelberg Leader-Follower Game” Model

China as leader - evidence (SCS, BRI, CI)

(in this kind of games, the leader enjoys inherent advantages)



# CHINA Territorial Concept

- “Ancient Possession”-Based Expansionism (Irredentism)
  - 「南海諸島自古以來就是中國領土」 (Ch Defense Ministry, [2018.8.31](#), referring to the Various Islands in the South China Sea)
  - 「遼東為舊中國之有，自魏涉周，置之度外... 今九瀛大定，唯此一隅...」(2nd emperor of Tang Dynasty, 645 CE, referring to ancient (c. 1700 BCE) Korea; quoted from the Song Dynasty text [《冊府元龜·帝王部·親征第二》唐太宗貞觀十九年二月段](#))
  - Ch Concession 租界 In Wonsan, Incheon, Busan, Korea [1884 - 1913](#)
  - Vietnam ruled by China since the beginning of the CE for 1,000+ years, was a tributary state of Ch from 14th century -1841 just before the French colonization
- Affecting Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang, Mongolia, etc

# CHINA Empire Model

- 九瀛 The Nine Oceans -- What's that?

ancient sentimental historiographical term referring to the mythical oceans surrounding the Middle Kingdom, all parts of an ancient Ch empire model.

- The Model - “The Five Subjugations” 五服 (《尚書·禹貢》c. 500 BCE or much earlier, about economic-political geography) :

The emperor's domain is in the middle, surrounded by four concentric bands of territories each 500 *li* wide, with the emperor's power radiating but decreasing outwards, and the defined tributes payable by the surrounding tributary states to the emperor also decreasing outwards. The fifth or outermost band, called Remote Subjugation 荒服, actually has no outer boundary, and expands and contracts with the military might of the Middle Kingdom. The model gives structure to the canonical concept of “Under the Heaven” - 溥天之下，莫非王土；率土之濱，莫非王臣 (Under the Heaven, all Land belongs to the Emperor. Governing to the Oceans' edge, all Officials submit to the Emperor's will.) (《詩經》c. 600 BCE or earlier). It also gave clear expression to China's version of the White Man's Burden: 東漸于海，西被于流沙，朔南暨聲教訖于四海。(East reaching the Waters, West to the Shifting Sands, and in the North and the South the Civilizing Voices reach the Four Seas.)

## CHINA Relevance Of Ancient Texts

- ancient texts are accessible and popular among the educated
- China uses them to support territorial claims
- the texts teach political norms; the Ch people instinctively use them to judge their rulers
- e.g., the concept of Prosperous Age 盛世 -- any Ch ruler who aspires to be great has to be seen to have ushered in a Prosperous Age, characterized by Civil Orderliness 文治 and Military Conquest 武功
- Ch rulers think in terms of those ancient norms -- rather than human rights, ruled-based int'l structure, nation-states, etc.

## CHINA Who Counts As Chinese?

Xi in 2017: “Like us, yellow skins, black hair -- can be traced back for 5 thousand years. We call ourselves the descendants of the Dragon.” ([CGTN 2017](#) 00'28)

- *de jure* incorrect but most common view
- flexible switch between the two views according to political need
- different from a values approach attributed to Confucius
- exclusive -- Tibetans, Uyghurs, TW aborigines, etc (subjects)
- inclusive -- all “Overseas Chinese” who fit the phys description

# CHINA Weaponizing the Chinese Diaspora

- Via :
  - secret societies (1911, 1949, 2019 Hong Kong)
  - communist parties (SE Asia, pre-1978)
  - business ties (since 1978)
  - academia (since 1921, esp after 1972)
  - individual ties (since 1921)
  - emigration of influence personnel (since at least 1978)
- Natural Extension Of The Modern Ch State
- Unfamiliar & underrated By The West -- “China lacks soft power” (27th out of 30 countries ranked) but actually soft power very effective and stealth in projecting influence
- Ch Expansionism From Empire Habit ⇒ Irredentism Supported By Military Means ⇒ Destabilize World Order ⇒ US Response

# THE US Responses to Externally Imposed Threats

- Soviet Threat : since 1917
  - The House Committee on Un-American Activities
  - [The Communist Control Act of 1954](#)
  - McCarthyism
- Japanese Threat : WW2 Pearl Harbor, 1941
  - [Executive Order 9066](#) (⇒ Internment of Japanese Americans, etc)

# THE US Soviet Threat 1919-1920

- severe labor unrests, race riots & terrorism, 1919
  - direct effect of 1917 Russian Revolution & international repercussions
  - Seattle General Strike - 65,000 participants, 5 days
  - Boston Police Strike - 72% of 1,500 police participated, nine killed
  - Cleveland May Day Riots - 2 killed, 116 arrested, mostly immigrants
  - nationwide steel strike - 365,000 participants
  - coal strike - 21 states, 400,000 participants (60%), 40 days
  - race riots - 20+ cities, dozens died
  - anarchist bombings - targeted politicians, officials, journalists and businessmen, judges and ministers all over the country, several killed
- response :
  - 3,000+ arrests, 500+ deportations, Immigration Act of 1924, red flag laws
  - fizzled out after 1920 May Day uprising alert failed to materialize
  - *Christian Science Monitor*: "What appeared to be an excess of radicalism was certainly met with an excess of suppression."
  - later narrative : First "Red Scare" Of 1919-1920

# THE US Soviet Threat 1930s-1950s

- Infiltration

- [Jones Orin York](#) - Douglas Aircraft Engineer, passed on classified fighter aircraft design to Soviet agents during 1941-43; confessed in 1950 to FBI and outed intricate Soviet spy network
- [Klaus Fuchs](#) - Manhattan Project physicist, passed atomic bomb secrets to USSR; convicted and served 9 years in UK, died in E. Germany 1988
- [Alger Hiss](#) - State Dept & US official at UN, convicted for perjury re spying for the USSR during the 30s; brother Donald also spy
- [Whittaker Chambers](#) - journalist, Soviet spy, defected 1938, outed Hiss
- [Elizabeth Bentley](#) - CPUSA member and Soviet spy 1938-45, defected and outed 80+ other spies, mostly in the US government
- [Nathan Gregory Silvermaster](#) - chief economist, War Assets Admin, US War Production Board, head of major Soviet spy ring within the US government known as the Silvermaster Group, outed by Bentley
- [Harry Dexter White](#) - Treasury Dept official & mastermind of the US Bretton Woods team, outed by Bentley and Chambers, died before conviction but shown to be Soviet spy in the Verona Project
- [Julius & Ethel Rosenberg](#) - CPUSA members, proven Soviet spies, handed atomic bomb secret to the USSR, sentenced to death in 1951.
- etc



# THE US Soviet Threat 1930s-1950s (cont'd)

- Chinese Threat : The Amerasia Espionage Case, 1945
  - Philip Jaffe - friend of Edgar Snow and the Yen-an crowd
  - Ji Chao-ding 冀朝鼎 - a founding editor, member CPUSA & CCP
  - trial and investigation by Congress - strong evidence of crime results in weak sentencing, prompting congressional response
- The McCarthy Hearings : Direct Consequence of Ch Threat
- The Communist Control Act of 1954 : completely ineffective
- later narrative - The Second “Red Scare” (in view of strong evidence of communist threats, the two “scare” narratives were clearly biased, objectively in favor of the communist actors encroaching upon the US)

## THE US Threat From Japan

- Pearl Harbor 1941
- Executive Order 9066 (1942) “Authorizing the Secretary of War to Prescribe Military Areas”
- Internment of 120,000 Japanese-Americans, plus ethnic Germans and some ethnic Italians
- Post WW2 Narratives: Unconstitutional , Racist

# US-CHINA CONFLICT Cold War

- Cold War / Hot War : strategic substitutes / complements
  - cold war - fought with soft power (cultural, economic, legal, info, diplomatic)
  - too little cold war may lead to too much hot war - strategic substitutes
- The Form Of The New Cold War Threat From China:
  - not via leftist labor movement, not via CPUSA, but via Ch Diaspora
  - weak US legal framework for effective response induces more Ch infiltration
- Revisionism: Neo-McCarthyism in the US ?
  - rise of the progressives already inducing a strong conservative reaction
  - Ch infiltration on all fronts - cultural, economic, massmedia, high tech,
  - US open society has to play defensive catch-up

# US-CHINA CONFLICT Limited Hot War

- Limited Hot War As Strategic Substitute For China
  - in Taiwan - Ch soft approach not working
  - China's soft power in West meet strong push back
  - Ch perception of US: can't fight hot wars well, e.g. Afghanistan
  - can produce hardware relatively cheap
- US Revisionism : “Internment Lite”
  - war time national security always trumps constitutional rights
  - internment - rule rather than exception the world over
  - WW2 internment of 120,000 (ethnic) Japanese, 11,000 Germans, 1,800 Italians in the US
  - WW2 internment of 21,000 Japanese, 4,000 Ukrainians in Canada
  - WW2 internment of 30,000 Germans, Austrians and Italians in the UK
  - WW2 internment of 12,000 total in Australia
  - WW2 internment of 130,000 whites in SE Asia by Japan
  - WW1 internment of 400,000 alien civilians aside from 9 m POWs in Europe
  - not all racism but could lead to more

# LIMITED HOT WAR & THE 2 DIASPORAS

- Neo-McCarthyism & Internment Lite -- how certain?
- Perceived Ch Threat to US today v. Jp Threat *Pre-Pearl Harbor*
  - transnationalism in the Ch Diaspora much stronger
  - size of Ch Diaspora much bigger
  - US/Ch GDP today is close to 1; US/Jp GDP in 1940 was nearly 5
  - US/Ch pop. ratio is  $\frac{1}{4}$ ; US/Jp pop was 1.8

⇒ *Perceived Ch Threat Today Much More Serious*
- Recent Aggressive Int'l & Regional Behavior of CCP
- FBI Lists Facilitate Selective Internment Of Ethnic Chinese in US

# POSSIBLE DIASPORAN RESPONSES

- Within Ch Diaspora:
  - repatriation - voluntary and forced
  - polarization - aggressive legal defense v. de-identification (cf FLG)
  - outing others - equivalents of Chambers & Bentley
  - careers & businesses hurt
- Within Hk Diaspora:
  - further de-identification of Chineseness (“HK is not China”)
  - stronger pro-HK Independence sentiments & groups
- Between Ch & Other Diasporan Groups:
  - tension with whites
  - expect little help from Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Indian, Tibetan, Uyghur, Russian diasporas

## SUMMING UP

Long-historical Chinese empire habit drives modern Chinese irredentism which upsets the existing world order, of which the US has been a prime architect and maintainer. Chinese infiltration, especially via the Chinese Diaspora, has been perceived by Americans as a serious close-range threat. In a Cold War + Limited Hot War scenario, the US response would be informed by its 20th century experience of dealing with two major external threats -- Soviet Infiltration and Pearl Harbor, which led to McCarthyism and the internment of enemy-related ethnic groups in the US. The current China-US conflict may then lead to revisionist thinking, possibly resulting in a neo-McCarthyism and a "Internment Lite" These would induce complex reactions in the Chinese and Hong Kong Diasporas.