

**“THE CHINA LOBBY”: INFLUENCES ON U.S.-CHINA
FOREIGN POLICY IN THE POST WAR PERIOD, 1949-1954**

By Jeff Blackwell

Generally defined, the “China Lobby” was a broad network of people, both foreign and domestic, whose interests coalesced around the goal of overthrowing of communism in China. It consisted of well-financed Nationalist Chinese officials in collaboration with right-wing U.S. political elites who worked toward the common goal of supporting Chiang Kai-shek’s recovery of mainland China from Mao Zedong and the Communist forces.¹ Aided by the anticommunist environment of the 1950s, the Lobby’s loose affiliation of influential individuals—including associates in the private sector, media, and politics—exerted considerable pressure on U.S. foreign policy decisions concerning China.

It is important to note that the term “lobby” in the United States usually describes a private group that attempts to influence policy.

¹ Ross H. Koen, *The China Lobby in American Politics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), ix-x. Koen’s book was actually withdrawn from publication—i.e., suppressed by efforts of the China Lobby—after printing in 1960 to remain legally unpublished until 1974.

Though similar, the China Lobby encompassed a more broadly based consensus of individuals that cooperated in the promotion of anticommunism and a pro-Chiang U.S. policy. Indeed, the Lobby operated in an unconventional manner and existed without any particular leader or organization at its center. Yet, it effectively exerted significant pressures on the U.S. government without going through regular channels of diplomacy. Moreover, the Lobby took advantage of U.S. anticommunist sentiments by circulating propaganda associating support of Chiang Kai-shek's regime with loyalty to the United States and the advocacy of democracy abroad.

This study will examine how the China Lobby attempted to influence U.S. foreign policy toward a pro-Chinese Nationalist agenda in the 1950s. Using various tactics, including use of political lobbying, sympathetic media outlets, and attacks on critics of pro-Nationalist policy, the China Lobby distorted public and political perceptions regarding U.S. policy toward China and effectively promoted a pro-Chiang Kai-shek foreign policy. Indeed, the China Lobby indeed held significant sway over U.S. foreign policy after 1949 and, particularly after Mao's victory in mainland China and the subsequent U.S. involvement in the Korean War, made use of an increasingly receptive American public as the domestic climate in the United States became increasingly anticommunist.

This examination of the China Lobby will scrutinize the organization's political influence during the period 1949-1954 and will address the following questions: What was the China Lobby? Who were members of the China Lobby? How, and why, did it form? What means did the Lobby use to influence U.S.-China foreign policy? And, were the Lobby's efforts successful in exerting pressure on U.S. foreign policy regarding China?

At the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949, U.S.-China relations had reached an impasse. The Communists had defeated Chiang-Kai-shek's forces and created a conundrum for U.S. policymakers. Many had not foreseen the Communist victory and Chiang's virtual exile to the island of Taiwan raised new dilemmas for policy and exacerbated

fears of Communist domination of Asia. As a Communist invasion of the island seemed inevitable, the U.S. weighed its options.

U.S. policymakers were divided on the issue of whether to defend Chiang on Taiwan if the Communists invaded. Secretary of State Dean Acheson, who had dealt with Chiang extensively in WWII, preferred to abandon the island, noting that if any of Chiang's disciples controlled the island it was doomed to fall to the Communists. For Acheson, the primary goal was to wean Mao Zedong away from Stalin and Soviet domination, thereby driving a wedge between the Communist states. However, prominent Republican Senators William Knowland and Robert Taft, joined by former President Herbert Hoover, vehemently opposed such a course and demanded that the U.S. protect Taiwan.²

President Truman tended to agree with Acheson. In January 1950, Truman issued a statement declaring that, while the U.S. would give Taiwan financial assistance, U.S. military forces would not intervene should the island fall victim to a Communist attack.³ Furthermore, the current situation seemed to present a favorable opportunity for formalized relations between the U.S. and the People's Republic of China (PRC). The strongest opposition to formalizing relations with the PRC rested with Chiang's supporters in public office, but even they saw the bleak reality of the Chinese Nationalist cause. Yet, in late June of 1955, any hope of Acheson's policy coming to fruition was unhinged by the outbreak of the Korean War and the eventual Chinese involvement in the conflict. Chiang Kai-shek supporters capitalized on the surge of U.S. anticommunism and challenged the existing "China policy."

The China Lobby coalesced in this political climate, bringing together people with differing motives and varying degrees of interest in China under the ideological banner of anticommunism. They constituted a diverse and disparate group of individuals composed of both public and private interests, including ardent supporters of Chiang Kai-shek and those more interested in using the Lobby's influence to further their own agenda. Regardless of origin, the China Lobby

² Warren I. Cohen, *America's Response to China: A History of Sino-American Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 166-167.

³ *Ibid.*, 170.

association, ranging from religious leaders and businessmen to politicians and journalists, coalesced in a common purpose of anticommunism and the Chinese Nationalist cause.

Part of the China Lobby's success was due to the lack of centralized structural organization. Even in contemporary studies a precise definition of who the China Lobby consisted of is difficult to ascertain. Indeed, the Lobby was certainly a mysterious entity in the 1950s. As *The New York Times* reported in 1951, "The China Lobby, despite references to it in and outside Congress, never has been presented in any tangible shape."⁴ However, despite the mystery surrounding the organization, particular individuals were unquestionably involved in the advocating the Lobby's agenda.

Although members were all influential in their own right, among the more notable was Alfred Kohlberg, a wealthy New York businessman who would later become a fanatical anticommunist and pro-Chiang supporter. He published over a dozen articles attacking the United States' non-interventionist policy toward China and those that supported it and subsidized at least two magazines supporting his views. He would also serve as chairman of the board of the American Chinese Policy Association (ACPA), an organization that surpassed all others in its directness of attacks on U.S. policy in China and contained considerable influence in Congress.⁵

Another intriguing affiliate of the China Lobby was Henry R. Luce, publisher of *Time* and *Life* newsmagazines. Luce held an ardent conviction that China was a prime target for U.S. uplift—whether as a model of political and economic development, religious faith, or diplomatic and military support. He also believed that Americans had a categorical obligation to fulfill in China's national destiny. Unsurprisingly, he made Chiang Kai-shek the cover story of *Time* magazine a record ten times.⁶ Henry Luce's role in advocating the

⁴ "House Urged to Launch 'China Lobby' Inquiry," *The New York Times*, June 8, 1951.

⁵ Koen, 50.

⁶ Michael H. Hunt, "East Asia in Henry Luce's American Century," *Diplomatic History* 23, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 323.

China Lobby's agenda through his media outlets was a fundamental aspect to the China Lobby's success.

In 1949, when the Chinese Communist Party emerged victorious in the Chinese Civil War, Lobby supporter's worst fears were confirmed about the spread of communism in Asia. The Communist victory shocked many Americans, who had often associated Chiang's regime with the efforts to establish democracy in China. In the minds of many Americans, the Communist victory was also equated a victory for the Soviet Union. Due to this perception, a large portion of the public, the press, and the membership of Congress came to believe the charge that Chiang had been "sold out" by the U.S. government.⁷ The development of closer relations between Peking and Moscow following the Communist victory, combined with the anticommunist feeling this engendered in the United States, made such allegations seem all the more justified.

In response to accusations that the U.S. had abandoned Chiang Kai-shek, the U.S. Department of State released the "China White Paper," a massive volume of documents and explanations to justify its policy of disengagement from the beleaguered Nationalist cause. By emphasizing the fact that the United States was not responsible for the fall of the Nationalist regime, the State Department sought to mollify opponents of its non-interventionist China policy, or at least to justify that policy to the American public in general. The effort failed, however, and provided the Republican Party with a useful political issue. Conservative members of the Republican Party saw their opportunity to deride the Truman administration's handling of events in China, and they attached their interests to those of the China Lobby. In the years to follow, the China Lobby bitterly charged that the State Department had "betrayed" Chiang, the United States' wartime ally, and launched campaigns to identify those allegedly responsible for the "loss" of China to Communist forces.⁸ In this alarmist climate, the "loss" of China debate helped to accelerate the momentum of the China Lobby.

⁷ Koen, 13.

⁸ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *Patterns in the Dust: Chinese-American Relations and the Recognition Controversy, 1949-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 80.

The Lobby's hope for the success its agenda increased exponentially in June of 1950, when North Korean forces crossed the 38th Parallel in a massive invasion of South Korea. Once the U.S. decided to defend South Korea, it would be increasingly difficult to explain why Taiwan should not also be defended. If the Chinese Communists attacked the island and simultaneously interfered with the defense of South Korea, the Truman administration would be terribly vulnerable to attacks from Chiang's supporters in the U.S. When Chinese forces eventually became involved in the conflict, U.S. opposition to Mao's regime hardened and simultaneously widened the circle of Americans who sought Chiang's return to power.

As the climate of anticommunist ardor increased in the U.S., Senate hearings were held in April of 1950 to investigate Senator Joseph McCarthy's accusations that State Department officials and some experts on China had been involved in a pro-communist conspiracy to influence the Truman administration's China policy. Popularized during the Senate hearings, the term "China Lobby" came into use at this time. The phrase gained greater prominence in June and July 1951, during the Senate hearings on Truman's removal of General Douglas MacArthur from his command in Korea. The subject of the China Lobby was introduced because MacArthur argued, in line with the China Lobby's charges, that General George Marshall's mission to China in 1945-1946 had been "one of the greatest blunders in American history."⁹ Pro-Chiang forces had criticized Marshall for having attempted to force Chiang into a political alliance with the Communists, and later, as Secretary of State, for having allegedly sabotaged U.S. aid to Chiang, therefore guaranteeing the "loss" of China to the Communists. Secretary of State Dean Acheson countered MacArthur's allegations by announcing that Truman had instructed all relevant government agencies to investigate the activities of the China Lobby.¹⁰

In support of Acheson, Oregon Senator Wayne Morse asserted that "the China Lobby," or the group supporting Chiang Kai-shek, had

⁹ William S. White, "Reply by General," *The New York Times*, June 10, 1951.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

“for several years been conducting a violent campaign against American policies in China”¹¹ Alfred Kohlberg, retorted, “The real ‘China Lobby’ is the pro-Communist lobby within the State Department.”¹² In response to the investigation, pro-Chiang forces denounced Acheson and demanded an investigation of “pro-Communist” China lobbies within the administration.

The congressional investigation of the China Lobby led by Senator Morse and others produced less than substantial findings. The probe had unearthed little in terms of concrete information about the operation of the Lobby despite clear indications that a substantial amount of money, largely from undisclosed sources, had been expended for a pro-Nationalist publicity and propaganda campaign and that a very close connection existed between the campaign and “certain politicians and public figures.”¹³ In the meantime, China Lobby forces, galvanized by the heightened voice among anti-Communist crusaders in Congress during the Korean War, intensified their efforts to discredit the administration’s China policy and to advocate continuing support of Chiang. Indeed, in the fierce anti-Communist climate of the time, the Lobby’s message found wide support, and critics of the Lobby exposed themselves to harsh censure from pro-Chiang advocates.

A major characteristic of the China Lobby was the way it propagated its arguments to the public. Indeed, the China Lobby became controversial for its extraordinary ability to discredit State Department officials and others for “betrayal” and “treason.” In historian Ross Koen’s view, “the China lobby was so successful in securing [public] acceptance of its explanation of America’s role in the Far East...because its propaganda exploited...the absence of an informed understanding of events in China”¹⁴ Such tactics appeared to have swayed a wide variety of Americans against the U.S. government’s policies toward China by

¹¹ “Acheson Proffers Data for Investigation of China Lobby,” *The New York Times*, July 8, 1951.

¹² Robert C. Doty, “Tsiang Denies Nationalist Support of a ‘China Lobby’ or Spokesman,” *The New York Times*, June 11, 1951

¹³ Robert Accineli, *Crisis and Commitment: United States Policy Towards Taiwan, 1950-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 77.

¹⁴ Koen, 22-23.

effectively utilizing propaganda that identified Chiang's regime with American ideals and contended that Americans had a special responsibility for China's development.

One of the ways that the China Lobby influenced public opinion and pressured foreign policy decisions regarding China was to form committees. The most active of these committees was the ACPA. From its creation in the 1940s until 1953, the ACPA published a tremendous volume of literature in the form of letters, pamphlets, brochures, reprints of Communist directives, press releases, and book reviews.¹⁵ Most of these were prepared and published in the office of Alfred Kohlberg, who tirelessly advocated the China Lobby's agenda through the efforts of the ACPA. Among the other influential committees were the China Emergency Committee and the Committee to Defend America by Aiding Anti-Communist.¹⁶ Not surprisingly, these various committees consisted of a similar membership. Thus, to a large degree, these committees' agendas blurred together, and they coordinated their efforts to achieve the most widespread effect on public opinion and foreign policy decisions.

Another committee that efficiently swayed foreign policy decisions regarding China was the Committee of One Million. The idea of the committee was conceived in October 1953 by Marvin Liebman, in partnership with Senator Walter Judd and Count Nicolas De Rocheffort, with the intention of initiating a petition listing eight reasons opposing Communist China to the United Nations. The petition would be presented to a broad list of VIP's in Congress, Republicans and Democrats alike, with the goal of giving the petition legitimacy when it was published in a newspaper advertisement to solicit more signatures.

Among the more prominent members to sign the initial petition were former President Herbert Hoover and former Ambassador Joseph C. Grew. Eventually garnering over one million signatures—hence the Committee of One Million—the petition's signers included: forty-nine members of Congress (twenty-three of whom were Democrats), twelve

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 51-52.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

governors, twenty retired generals and admirals (including General George C. Marshall), fourteen prominent religious leaders, and numerous scientists, educators, and business leaders.¹⁷ *The New York Times* reported at the time that New York's four most prominent veteran's organizations were mobilizing to collect signatures for the petition. According to the petitions spokesman, it was "a protest against the indignities to which those Chinese have been subjected by the ugly dogma and practice of international Communist imperialism."¹⁸ At the collection of the millionth signature, the petition was presented to President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who received the initial signatories in the White House and allowed Judd to make his case for denying the Communist China membership in the United Nations. It is difficult to assess how effective the petition was on President Eisenhower, yet at a news conference on July 7, 1953 Eisenhower announced that he would oppose Communist China's admittance to the UN.¹⁹ In this instance, it does not seem unreasonable to speculate that the China Lobby did indeed help to sway foreign policy decisions concerning China.

Another means by which the China Lobby sought to influence foreign policy was through the media, undoubtedly one of the most efficient ways to disseminate propaganda. Alfred Kohlberg alone subsidized the pro-Chiang magazines *The China Monthly* and *Plain Talk* as outlets to denounce United States policy in China. Articles from *The China Monthly* frequently found their way into the congressional record, and the magazine has been cited as a source of China Lobby propaganda in congressional hearings.²⁰ Moreover, *The China Monthly* frequently served as the major organ for the dissemination of the views of Americans associated with the China Lobby. In fact, neither magazine served not as a financially viable business, they were primarily mouthpieces for the diffusion of propaganda critical of U.S. foreign policy toward China.

¹⁷ Marvin Liebman, *Coming Out Conservative: An Autobiography* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1992), 106-107.

¹⁸ "Red China and the UN," *The New York Times*, May 30, 1953.

¹⁹ Bachrack, 81.

²⁰ Koen, 49-50.

A number of other influential publications also helped to advocate the agenda of the Chinese National Government and the China Lobby. Foremost among these publications were *Collier's*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Readers Digest*, *U.S. News and World Report*, and both *Time* and *Life* newsmagazines.²¹ Additionally, newspapers such as *The Washington Times-Herald*, the *Los Angeles Examiner*, the *San Francisco Examiner*, and the *Oakland Tribune* were also consistent in their criticism of U.S. policy and in their defense of the Chinese Nationalist cause.²² As the anticommunist climate grew in the U.S. during the decade of the 1950s, the tendency for the press to accept the viewpoint of the China Lobby also expanded. By the mid-1950s the prevalence of the China Lobby influenced bias in the press was near universal.

For example, Chiang's most influential American friend, Henry Luce, turned *Time* and *Life* newsmagazines into advocates for the Chinese Nationalist Party. A fiercely partisan Republican, Luce readily blamed Democrats of denying Chiang essential aid and portrayed the Nationalists as an anticommunist bulwark. These concerns, combined with his aspirations for a U.S.-influenced China, led him into a loose affiliation of pro-Chiang advocates, later called the China Lobby. Luce became one of the more prominent members of the Lobby's associates, both due to his wealth and prominence, as well as for his proficiency at disseminating pro-Chiang propaganda to the American public. Using Time Inc.'s media outlets—including its magazines, films, and radio programs—Luce conveyed his conception of a China advancing under Chiang's leadership with U.S. patronage. The exact number of copies of *Time* and *Life* that were sold during this period is uncertain, but by biographer W.A. Swanberg's estimate, Luce stood guilty of "manipulating 50 million people weekly."²³

Another aspect of the use of media to disseminate pro-Chiang propaganda and change U.S. policy towards China was the effort to discredit Far Eastern experts who did not continue to embrace the

²¹ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

²² *Ibid.*, 55.

²³ W.A. Swanberg, *Luce and His Empire* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), 472.

Nationalist cause after the Communist victory. After Chiang's defeat, such Far Eastern experts had come to believe that the Chinese Revolution had run its course and the future of mainland China no longer involved Chiang as an eventual leader. These experts constituted a small number of individuals and tended to maintain close ties and associations. Partly due to this intimacy, the close association of the Far Eastern experts tended to create the impression of unanimity on China policy, which substantially increased the impact of these scholars' views on the American public.

Due to this apparent accord amongst the small group of Far Eastern experts, the China Lobby set about to discredit this prevailing school of thought. To this end, Lobby members began to levy the charge that China specialists had expressed a lack of belief in Chiang, a conviction in the ultimate triumph of the Communists, and had ultimately contributed to Mao's victory. In the context of the growing anticommunist climate in the United States, this accusation allowed the China Lobby to make an effective case for its attack on U.S. foreign policy. Accusations involving Communist sympathy and the use of Communist sources were therefore adopted early on in the attempt to discredit China specialists that were not pro-Chiang.

As these attacks were being written and published, they also began to gain public exposure through the congressional investigation of Owen Lattimore. Lattimore was a well-known Far Eastern specialist and writer who had traveled extensively in China and was generally recognized amongst scholars as an expert on the interior areas of China and Mongolia. He was also an ideal target for the China Lobby. By damaging Lattimore's reputation and his legitimacy as a Far Eastern scholar, the China Lobby could more effectively advocate the viewpoint of a pro-Chiang U.S. policy to the American public. By voicing a pro-Chiang U.S. policy through the outlet of scholarly expertise, the China Lobby could go a long way in promoting their agenda.

The China Lobby's attack on Owen Lattimore may have begun primarily because of Alfred Kohlberg's unsuccessful attempt to gain control over the Institute for Pacific Relations. The campaign to discredit Lattimore continued for nearly five years, carried on primarily

through Kohlberg's publications of *Plain Talk* and *The China Monthly*.²⁴ In early 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy presented a complete compilation of all the attacks previously levied on Lattimore by Kohlberg. These charges made national headlines and focused on Lattimore as the central player.

The New York Times, for example, described Lattimore as "the top Russian espionage agent in this country," and claimed that he was "dragged by the heels into a Senate subcommittee investigating...charges of communism in the State Department."²⁵ Lattimore spent thirteen days testifying before the subcommittee refuting the committee's accusations that his writings had been used to further the cause of the Soviet Union. Without ample evidence to support their claims, the committee recommended that the Department of Justice charge Lattimore with perjury. Although the charge was formalized by the Department of Justice, the court threw out key components of the indictment on the grounds of their vagueness and eventually dismissed the indictment. *The New York Times* offered their take on Lattimore's trial: "Mr. Lattimore's real offense was that he had come to differ sharply with something he calls 'the China Lobby.'"²⁶ Although Lattimore escaped further prosecution, the original purpose of the attack was accomplished: the widespread publicity given to the accusations against had damaged his reputation. Scholars associated with him also became more vulnerable to accusations of Communist affiliation by the associates of the Lobby. Moreover, objective information regarding China policy was diminished while pro-Chiang propaganda was accentuated.

The encompassing effects of the China Lobby on U.S. foreign policy toward China are difficult to gauge. To a certain extent the China Lobby's views seem to have become widely accepted due to the anti-Communist climate in the U.S. during the early 1950s, and the effectiveness of the Lobby's propaganda efforts. The Lobby was also

²⁴ Ibid., 118.

²⁵ R.L. Duffus, "The Dramatic Case of Mr. Lattimore," *New York Times*, July 30, 1950.

²⁶ Ibid.

highly successful in disseminating the view that anti-Chiang sentiment meant disloyalty to the United States. The Lobby's propaganda unquestionably damaged the reputations of scholars, journalists, and politicians alike. The widely assorted and loosely affiliated China Lobby membership effectively used their political connections and media propaganda to channel their views. Lobby propaganda also fanned the flames of the growing anticommunist climate in the U.S., helping to create a political environment where their agenda would be more acceptable to the American public.

The political pressure that the China Lobby could bring to bear during the early 1950s should not be underestimated. As Michael Schaller states, "by the late 1950s, despite a broad agreement on the need to revisit [China] policy, few politicians were prepared to take the heat from the China Lobby."²⁷ The China Lobby and its allies, buttressed by the Republican Party, were able to aggressively argue for their cause and to intimidate those that might express contrary viewpoints. Exemplified through the well-known McCarthy hearings, the penalty for opposing the anticommunist crusaders and their China Lobby allies could be severe. However it is fair to say that despite the zeal of McCarthy and men like him, many of Chiang's most ardent supporters actually cared little about China one way or the other, and only found it a useful issue to advance their personal political agendas. Although the China Lobby held significant sway over U.S. foreign policy—and had thus far prevented the formal recognition of the PRC—Chiang Kai-shek was no closer to regaining the China mainland than he had been since his expulsion by Mao in 1949.

In this regard, the China Lobby achieved mixed results in obtaining their long term goals: Chiang Kai-shek had not "retaken" mainland China, but Taiwan had also not been overrun by the PRC. And, although the United States provided the military support necessary to prevent a Communist invasion of Taiwan (which had seemed imminent after the Communist government shelled the nearby islands of Quemoy and Matsu in 1954), the U.S. had also increasingly advocated a

²⁷ Michael Schaller, *The United States into the Twenty First Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 153.

“two China policy” that recognized both the Communist and Nationalist governments. Moreover, even though Taiwan became incorporated into the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, severe limitations were imposed on Chiang’s ability to initiate aggression against the PRC. In fact, Taiwan’s incorporation into SEATO, was accompanied not only Secretary of State John Foster Dulles’ demand that Chiang “stop telling his people that their return to the mainland was imminent,” but also by the notice that the U.S. would refuse by its Security Council veto power should the United Nations voted to seat the PRC.²⁸

In the following years, as Lobby members realized that mainland China had been definitively lost to the PRC, support of Taiwan would come to be the focal point of the Lobby’s efforts. With the relationship of the PRC and the United States in a mutually suspicious state of limbo after 1955, the China Lobby continued to rally for pro-Nationalist causes and the denial of UN recognition for the PRC. Nonetheless, from 1949 to 1955, the China Lobby unquestionably held significant sway over public and political perception on the United States’ China policy, and therefore, significantly influenced policy developments. Indeed, it can only be speculated how much effect China Lobby pressure had on politicians and the policies that they rendered. Although the China Lobby ultimately failed in its goal of returning Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalist government to power in China, it is nevertheless important to note that it would be nearly twenty years before the PRC would finally gain admittance to the United Nations.

²⁸ Cohen, 184-185.

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