
IMAGINING THE CHINESE HOME- LAND FROM AMERICA IN THE RADICAL AGE, 1969-1976

Yibing Du

Introduction by Jennifer Burns, Associate Professor of
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Although they may have appeared interchangeable to outsiders in the mid-twentieth century United States, affluent Taiwanese university students and working-class residents of American Chinatowns had little in common. How then did some members of these communities come together around a shared vision of China? Set against the backdrop of radical political movements in the late 1960s and 1970s, Yibing Du's essay tackles this question. "Imagining the Chinese Homeland from America in the Radical Age, 1969-1976," analyzes the Tiao-Yu Tia movement to uncover both the literal connections forged through activism and the shared imaginary developed around Communist China. A territorial agreement shifting sovereignty of the Tiao-Yu Tai islands from the United States to Japan catalyzed a social movement that caused both students and Chinatown activists to rethink their relationship to China and Taiwan. Drawing on student publications, mainstream news accounts, fiction, memoir, and oral history, Yibing deftly outlines the dreams, challenges, and social problems that resulted in a new vision of China as homeland. While the intersections of race and politics of the 1960s have a robust historiography, by taking a transnational angle Yibing has found a fresh approach. Yibing's research, which she plans to continue in a senior thesis, is particularly noteworthy as the 50th anniversary of these events approach. History suffers when the only chroniclers of social movements are those who participated. Yibing's scholarship breaks new ground by offering a perspective based in archival research and oral history, mediating between personal memories and the larger significance of transcontinental political movements.

Imagining the Chinese Homeland from America in the Radical Age, 1969-1974

Yibing Du

The early 1970s was the time of Mao, Che, and the Panthers. The climate of revolutionary thoughts and protests in America brought two groups closer together: Chinese American youths from Chinatowns and Taiwanese students attending American universities. Neither the Chinese American activists nor the Taiwanese students had ever lived in the People's Republic of China (PRC). Nonetheless, each group independently developed the belief that Communist China was its only homeland.

Since 1969, several Maoist organizations had emerged in San Francisco and New York Chinatowns. In their vision, both Chinese and Chinese Americans and other working-class and anti-imperialist comrades were part of their revolutionary struggle. From other minority activists, these organizations learned to solve issues in their community, reassess their relationship with the Chinese homeland, and spread Marxist-Leninist ideas. To them, America was the source of all evil. Its capitalism oppressed its racial minorities and working classes, while its imperialism tyrannized the Third World, including China. These activists publicized their vision in alternative presses, revealing the hidden thoughts of Chinese Americans that were often neglected by mainstream media.¹ They portrayed a utopian image of Communist China and contrasted an imagined Chinese homeland with the disappointing reality of America's Chinatowns. Though small in number, these activists challenged Chinatown authorities and prompted other members of their community to change their views about Communism—an ideology that many immigrants had learned to hate either in America or in their hometowns in Taiwan or Hong Kong.

Meanwhile, another activist group emerged on college campuses and eventually created a nationwide intellectual network: Action Committees to Defend Tiao-Yu Tai. Starting in early 1971,

1 William Wei, *The Asian American Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 101.

Taiwanese students in American universities protested against a territorial dispute over the Tiao-Yu Tai Island that involved the United States, Japan, and China. The government of the Republic of China (ROC), under the Taiwanese Nationalist Party (KMT), attempted to silence the student protests against the “U.S.-Japan conspiracy” since its legitimacy to represent China relied on American support. Disgruntled students soon turned this patriotic campaign into an effort to spread Communism among overseas Chinese. By mid-1971, this student movement transcended the island dispute and splintered into several factions: pro-Communist, pro-independence, pro-unification (merging Taiwan to Communist China), and countless others in between. The dominant claim was that Red China, instead of Taiwan, should be recognized as the legitimate government representing the Chinese people. Student activists founded over a hundred journals, almost all handwritten in Chinese. Though their articles were only circulated within a small community, they catalyzed fascinating discussions about abstract political concepts as well as practical plans of action.²

The trajectories of Chinese and Chinese American activism followed parallel and sometimes intersecting paths. Their movements coincided with the groundbreaking moments in international political history, such as the international recognition of the PRC as China’s legitimate government in November 1971, when the PRC replaced the ROC as the representative member for China in the United Nations. Henry Kissinger’s secret trip to Communist China announced in July of that year and President Nixon’s following visit in February 1972 further excited student activists and challenged other overseas Chinese to reevaluate their political

2 One of the most important Asian American journals, *Gidra*, printed only 4,000 copies; many did not survive more than a few issues. Meanwhile, as a Taiwanese student writer Li Yu later lamented, “we were merely copying and printing and reading among ourselves, and then throwing them to the trash ourselves.” in Yu Li, 应答的乡岸 [The Homeland Shore Answering My Call] (Taipei: Hong Fan, 1999): 1, quoted in Qifeng Huang, 河流裡的月印: 郭松棻與李渝小說綜論 [The Moon in Rivers: Essays on the Novels by Guo Songfen and Li Yu] (Showwe Information, 2008): 38.

affiliations.³

This paper will investigate the role of an imagined homeland between the twin movements of Chinatown youths and Taiwanese students. First, it will offer background on the politics of Chinese America and case studies for how different activist groups operated and briefly interacted. By analyzing newspapers, journals, works of fiction, and memoirs produced by both movements, this paper will then reveal how students and activists constructed their visions of a Chinese homeland. They read Marxist-Leninist-Maoist theories to study its ideology, created a romanticized image of the PRC based on limited information, narrated a specific history of Chinese and Chinese Americans, and deployed Communist rhetoric and symbolism to assert their sense of belonging. Finally, this paper will return to the role of America in their search for a new Chinese homeland. By juxtaposing the histories of these two groups, this paper will argue that overseas Chinese, while liberated by an American tradition of activism, were also disheartened by the American and Taiwanese authorities under which they lived and, ultimately, projected their unfulfilled dreams onto a homeland they had never seen and an ideology they had been taught to hate.

The Secretly Politicized Chinese America

Chinatowns in the late 1960s across the major U.S. cities were more or less the same: restaurants, laundromats, prostitutes, weeds, and gangsters. If anything, crime rate and poverty worsened with the influx of Chinese immigrants into the United States in search of a better life after the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, which eased a number of restrictions on immigration in place since the 1920s.⁴ Language barriers, inadequate educational opportunities, and a lack of contact with the society beyond Chinatown hindered most of these new immigrants from pursuing the “American dream.” The patron of most Chinatowns, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA), sought to keep

3 “Changing Attitudes on Red China Polarize N.Y. Chinatown,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, Oct. 12, 1971; “Maoist welcome for China mission: New York, Nov. 12,” *South China Morning Post*, Nov. 13, 1971; “Taiwan backers from N.Y. Chinatown protest outside Peking mission's hotel,” *The Boston Globe*, Nov. 15, 1971.

4 Gabriel Chin, “The Civil Rights Revolution Comes to Immigration Law: A New Look at the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965,” *North Carolina Law Review* 75, no. 1 (1996): 317.

Chinatowns as isolated ethnic enclaves, exacerbating problems of poverty, violence, and insufficient social welfare.⁵

Political action was a risky endeavor in these enclaves. Residents operated under the scrutiny of the FBI, the American police, and KMT agents. J. Edgar Hoover claimed, “Red China has been flooding the country with its propaganda” and that Chinese immigrants “could be susceptible to recruitment.”⁶ As a result, Chinese American activists were particularly suspicious to the local police. When the police discovered that a young man, Harry Wong, who ran a newsstand, was a firm believer of Mao and socialist China, they raided his goods, arrested him without explanation, and choked him at his throat.⁷ Meanwhile, CCBA was deeply rooted in transnational politics. Operated on behalf of the KMT, it aimed to maintain the ROC’s domination over overseas Chinese.⁸ The KMT was known to monitor its overseas citizens, especially university students, by appointing “student spies” who lived off the KMT’s rewards for their secret reports. As a result, Chen Yu-his from the University of Hawaii was arrested and sentenced for seven years for reading socialist publications in the library in 1969.⁹ Xianmin Wang, the father of a progressive Taiwanese student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, was forced to announce to disown his daughter after she visited the PRC.¹⁰ The fear of Communism shared by the FBI and CCBA led

5 Michael Liu, Kim Geron, and Tracy Lai, *The Snake Dance of Asian American Activism: Community, Vision, and Power* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008), 29.

6 A debate on the validity and applicability of the testimony of John Edgar Hoover a 1969 congressional record indicated that this opinion remained influential in the late sixties. Philip Burton, “Chinese Americans in San Francisco,” *91st Congress Records*, 1969, 21303.

7 Go Oyagi, “Over the Pacific: Post-World War II Asian American Internationalism,” (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2013), 154.

8 For instance, each New York Chinatown CCBA president in the sixties and seventies was simultaneously the executive committee member of KMT U.S. East Coast Branch and Overseas Community Affairs Council. See the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association website, <https://www.ccbany.org/chistorypresidents.html>.

9 Chien-Jung Hsu, “Surveillance on Overseas Taiwanese Students under the KMT’s Administration: A Case Study in the United States,” *Taiwan Studies in Literature and History* 1 (2009): 264.

10 Yu He, “Overseas ‘Baodiao No. 0 Group,’” *Renmin Zhengxie Bao*, *Chunqiu Zhoukan* no. 9, January 15, 2015: 3.

to paralleled efforts to eliminate Leftist activity. For Chinese and Chinese Americans, avoiding politics was the safest move because association with Communist China could send a dangerous signal to suspecting authorities.

Nevertheless, politics in America's Chinatowns bloomed as a result of domestic and international pressure. Despite general pessimism about both Chinese governments, many overseas Chinese immigrants became interested in learning about their homeland by the late 1960s, especially as China became internationally influential and a hot topic in the time of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). In 1967, Yiming Bao, a Columbia-educated Taiwanese intellectual in Hong Kong, published articles entitled "Study the Whole China—From Bandit Studies to National Studies" and "Overseas Chinese's Divisions, Homecoming and Opposition to Independence." As one historian, Robert Eng, has argued, Bao was the first to address "the alienation of the overseas Chinese under conditions of political division and spiritual exile."¹¹ Intellectuals, like Bao, were embittered by the ongoing White Terror under the KMT, which turned their homeland into "a nation afflicted with a spiritual disease and therefore unable to strengthen itself or change its set ways of inhumanity."¹² Thus, many started to reexamine their ideology shaped by anti-Communist Taiwan and look for alternatives. Very few of these writers had much prior experience with socialist ideology, yet many eventually decided that Communist China was likely the best model because its social engineering was believed to have ameliorated poverty and allayed the threat of foreign powers.¹³

Two Youth Movements in Chinese America

Patriotic international students and scholars soon had an opportunity to further the debate and voice their opinions. News broke out in late 1969 that the Nixon-Sato Joint Declaration had been signed, returning Tiao-Yu Tai Island to Japan in 1972. Locat-

11 Robert Y. Eng, "The Intractability of the Sino-Japanese Senkaku/Diaoyu Territorial Dispute: Historical Memory, People's Diplomacy and Transnational Activism, 1961-1978," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 15, no. 22 (2017): 20.

12 C.T. Tsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 533-534.

13 Li-Yun Lin, Jui-Hua Chen, and Shu-Fen Su, "The Protest Diaoyutai Movement and Overseas Leftist Movement: An Interview with Shiao-Shin Lin," *Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies* 103 (2016): 159-160.

ed between Taiwan, the Chinese mainland, and Japan, this island was occupied by the United States from 1945 and remained obscure prior to the discovery of oil reserves in 1968. Though the island was small and inhabitable, students were outraged at this “imperial conspiracy” that harmed China’s sovereignty, threatened its national interests, and reminded many of the Japanese invasion of China during WWII. Thus, in December 1970, Taiwanese students at Princeton University founded the first action committee in the United States as a forum to voice their nascent political grievances.¹⁴ Soon, thousands of students were drawn by the clarion call of defending Chinese territory.¹⁵ Though many students were initially unsure about how to react, various forms of student activism on college campuses, including anti-war protests and self-determination movements, provided models for them to take action.

This movement immediately drew the KMT’s attention. Having lost power in mainland China by 1949, the KMT was desperate to maintain its influence on the overseas Chinese population.¹⁶ The Taiwanese government was caught in an awkward position between its most important allies and its patriotic youths. On January 6, 1971, KMT representatives in New York received the official instruction to “subtly convince the students not to organize, [...] guide them to become a pro-government movement...” because “we cannot allow anti-government expressions.”¹⁷ The KMT

14 Chih-ming Wang, “Tracking Baodiao: Diaspora, Sovereignty, and Chinese American Resistance,” *Chinese America: History & Perspectives* (2009): 131.

15 Youths from Taiwan, along with some from Hong Kong and some Chinese Americans, were already a tight community on campus. There were at least Chinese-related student associations at Columbia: Chinese Student Association, The Dragon Club, School of Education Student Association (mostly Taiwanese students), Taiwanese Student Society, and Bible Study Fellowship. See Yuan-jun Liu, interview by Xiaocen Xie, Yawen Li, and Hongyin Cai, Oct. 24, 2008, transcript, <http://archives.lib.nthu.edu.tw/diaoyun/history/03.htm>.

16 Jeanie Dere, “A Wei Min Sister Remembers,” *Chinese America: History and Perspectives* (2009): 65.

17 Ren-Bo Wu, “Reexamining Diaoyutai Movement in the Early 1970s: Perspectives from the Government of Republic of China,” *Shi yun* 15 (2011): 141.

suspected that students would take this opportunity to self-organize and oppose the government. Indeed, the ROC's lack of response to the dispute infuriated the students and made them feel betrayed. One activist recalled how a special "public hearing" of a student spy they discovered in 1971 worsened people's impressions of the KMT. The spy revealed that, while the KMT told student representatives that it endorsed their protests, only its "core members," the spies among the students, received the real command to quell the movement as quickly as possible.¹⁸ Suspecting the students' loyalties, KMT officials openly interfered with their meetings and reading groups.¹⁹

As the students learned about the inefficiency and hypocrisy of the KMT, what started as a patriotic movement transformed into a radical Leftist campaign and an attempt to redefine Chinese politics. An irreconcilable divide emerged among students on issues of whether to unite the two Chinas and whether the Communist Party was just. They published articles, formed reading groups, and vehemently debated during meetings. This sentiment peaked at national conferences at Brown University and the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Polarized views, subtle distinctions, and shifting opinions on many questions suggested that the movement was no longer united as one. A survey at the Ann Arbor meeting showed that the majority were pro-Communist and pro-unification.²⁰

Many Taiwanese students sought sympathy and support from peace-loving, anti-imperialist American friends. While Americans had to guess what was going on in Beijing, it was far easier to learn about the Chinese and Chinese Americans around them.²¹ Indeed, it was partly through American curiosity that these student organizations gained a new audience. The association of overseas Chinese with their homeland, in turn, prompted the Leftist activ-

18 Yi Ding, 釣運十年有感 [Thoughts about TYT Ten Years Afterward], *Wide Angle* 106 (July, 1981): 76.

19 Wu, 144.

20 Yu-ming Shaw, 保釣風雲路：一九七〇年代保衛釣魚台運動-知識分子之激情、分裂、抉擇 [The Bumpy Road of Baodiao: Defending Tiao Yu Tai in the Seventies—The Passion, Divides, and Decisions among Intellectuals] (Taipei: Linking Publishing Company, 2013), 74-75.

21 Erwin D. Canham, "China, Here and There," *The Christian Science Monitor*, Oct. 4, 1971: 16.

ists to engage with these curious Americans. Students made their movement bilingual as much as possible and invited journalists from mainstream newspapers and television to their protests.²² To win the public's favor, a Chinese student even published an article in the *New York Times* to explain their stance.²³ Philadelphia's Tiao-Yu Tai Action Committee and Chinatown activists from the Yellow Seeds co-organized a Sino-American Friendship Night in 1973, which indicated their mutual interest in breaking the ice between the PRC and the United States.²⁴

Community activists also appealed to their "siblings" in Chinatowns, where they could adopt practical policies, such as selling groceries to fellow activists at a discounted price, and political strategies, such as screening pro-Communist films. On the East Coast, a group of pro-unification students published the *Chinese Language Movement* journal to highlight the shared culture of Taiwan and the mainland, arguing that Taiwan should merge with the ideologically "advanced" Communist China. Out of 3,000 copies for each volume, one third were disseminated throughout New York City's Chinatown.²⁵ In San Francisco, they operated Chinese-language television channels and organized a singing competition called "Songs of Our Time," which led to a successful "soft landing on Chinatown."²⁶ These students and scholars proudly announced that they were finally part of the mass. An activist fondly remembered: "They put aside their sense of superiority as intellectuals, mingled well with immigrants and other laborers, and provided all kinds of service for their daily life."²⁷ Though the activist efforts to publicize the pro-Communist message did cater to a wide audience, a statement such as this one suggests that success-

22 Dong, Yin, and Yang, 258.

23 Hao Wang, "Senkaku Islands—A Dispute Put in Perspective," *New York Times*, May 30, 1971: E12.

24 "Sino-America Friendship Night," *Yellow Seeds* 1, no. 5, May 1973.

25 Yushan Liu, "An Analysis of the 1970s Bao-Diao Movement Based on the Historical Materials Preserved in Tsinghua University Libraries," *Overseas Chinese History Studies* 1 (2012): 44.

26 Anti-Communist Patriotic Alliance, 愛盟·保釣: 風雲歲月四十年 [Anti-Communist Patriotic Alliance & Baodiao: An Epic of Forty Years] (Taipei: Fengyun Shidai Publishing, 2011), 209-210.

27 Zhongwu Gong, "釣運學刍議" [Preliminary Comments on the Study of the Tiao Yu Tai Movement], Wuyou zhixiang, May 15, 2011. Accessed November 29, 2019. <http://www.wywxwk.com/Article/sichao/2011/05/225742.html>.

ful activism required the suspension of a normally condescending tone towards the population at large. Indeed, many of the politically active overseas students in the United States were members of the elite in Taiwan, and always had the choice to return. Junshan Shen, whose father was the Minister of the ROC Council of Agriculture at the time, complained that in the U.S., he and his peers were “merely a group outside of the powerful elite,” yet “things would be so different” when they go back.²⁸

While the idea of a Chinese homeland was mobilized to emphasize the shared cultural and political roots of Chinese and Chinese Americans, it carried different meanings for each group. In 1969, Alex Hing, a young man from San Francisco’s Chinatown, left Legitimate Ways (Leway) with a small group of friends. Leway was a short-lived self-help group designed to manage local recreational facilities and support peers during rehabilitation.²⁹ While Hing and his comrades were in search of a greater goal to pursue, they were asked by Taiwanese students from the Asian American Progressive Association to help facilitate a patriotic celebration of the anniversary of the May Fourth Movement, a student-led nationalist campaign in 1919.³⁰ After this unusual collaboration, Hing’s group asked the Taiwanese students to come out together as a joint activist group; however, the students declined because they were concerned about the consequences of abandoning the KMT.

Aborting the plan was not a surprising move. Despite sharing a vague concept of their homeland, Hing’s activists embodied Chinatown, not China. Hing did not hesitate to cast doubt upon the priorities of the students: “Who gives a shit about what hap-

28 Junshan Shen, 革新保台、志願統一 [Reforms to Preserve Taiwan and Look Forward to Unifying China], in 風雲的年代——保釣運動及留學生涯之回憶 [A Time of Wind and Clouds—Baodiao Movement and Memories of Overseas Studies], ed. Yu-ming Shaw. (Taipei: Linking Publishing Company, 1991), 49.

29 Angela L. Zhao, “The Righteous Fists of Harmony: Asian American Revolutionaries in the Radical Minority and Third World Liberation Movements, 1968-1978,” (BA diss., University of Chicago, 2018), 14.

30 Harvey C. Dong, “The Origin and Trajectory of Asian American Political Activism in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1968-1978,” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2002), 224.

pened 50 years ago in China. Right? We said there is more important stuff happening with the Chinese community now.”³¹ Though neither Taiwanese students nor Chinatown youngsters ever lived under Communism, the former still felt a deep connection with the PRC because the mainland was where most of their parents were from, and some had even spent their childhood there. Connecting with Mao’s China proved to be a much more convoluted process for multi-generation Chinese Americans.

Later in 1969, Hing and his comrades started a new Marxist-Leninist militant group, the Red Guard Party. A “quasi-criminal and quasi-political” gang, the Red Guards were, in the eyes of journalists, essentially a politicized gang influenced by the Black Panthers’ ideals.³² Indeed, there was a connection to be drawn between the two groups. In a bilingual rally by the Red Guards, David Hilliard, Chief of Staff of the Panthers, spoke to an audience of nearly 200 people.³³ Hilliard highlighted the danger of assimilating into whiteness and emphasized that Chinese Americans needed to reestablish their relationship with the Chinese homeland: “If you can’t relate to China then you can’t relate to the Panthers.”³⁴ As their connection with the Panthers demonstrates, the Red Guards were both partially nationalistic and partially communist. Yet, despite the Panthers’ direct influence, the Red Guards envisioned a very different mission: “whereas the blacks see the dominant white society as their chief enemy, the Chinese activists are primarily in rebellion against the older generation of their own people, particularly the Chinese landlords and merchants.”³⁵ Like their counterparts in other major U.S. cities, they were primarily concerned with the class struggle within Chinatown.

The Red Guards were proud of their grassroots, pro-Peking,

31 Ibid., 286.

32 Stanford M. Lyman, “Red Guard on Grant Avenue,” in *Culture and Civility in San Francisco*, ed. Howard S. Becker (Chicago: Transaction Books, 1971), 23.

33 Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 281.

34 *AAPA Newspaper*, March 1969: 4, quoted in Daryl J. Maeda, *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 85.

35 Kenneth LaMott, “The Awakening of Chinatown,” *Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 4, 1970: N6.

and Marxist stances. Despite a tepid response from the Chinatown community, the group peaked at a few dozen active members. In 1971, Hing and his Red Guards merged with comrades from New York, the I Wor Kuen (“Righteous Harmonious Fist,” a reference to the Boxer Rebellion against Westerners around 1900).³⁶ The formation of this national organization marked the emergence of “Asian American” as a nationwide ethnopolitical identity.³⁷ At the same time, many other Chinese American activist groups also prospered: Wei Min She (“Serve the People,” San Francisco), Yellow Seeds (Philadelphia), and *Gidra* (an Asian American journal at UCLA), among others.³⁸

The Tiao-Yu Tai movement prompted these organizations to think about their relationship with the Chinese homeland. Some argued that shared language and culture were enough to convince them to side with people from their home country. Others were skeptical about getting involved in transnational politics and “bothered” by a dispute thousands of miles away. They believed the island affair would only be relevant to them if “there is a close correspondence between an ethnic group’s treatment in the United States and the international standing of that group’s homeland.”³⁹ As a result of this debate, some IWK and Black Panthers joined the Tiao-Yu Tai demonstrations, because they wanted to liberate the oppressed, regardless whether the oppression was due to racism,

36 Unlike Red Guards, the majority of which being street youths, any IWK members were from elite families, including students at Columbia, Princeton, and Sarah Lawrence. See Chia-ling Kuo, “Voluntary Associations and Social Change in New York Chinatown,” (PhD diss., New York University, 1975), 104; Carmon Chow, “Righteous Harmonious Fist,” *Gidra*, June 1971; “History of I Wor Kuen,” *Statements on the Founding of the League of Revolutionary Struggle (Marxist-Leninist)*, 1978.

37 Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (New York: Verso, 2002), 77.

38 Asian Community Center Archive Group, *Stand Up: An Archive Collection of the Bay Area Asian American Movement, 1968-1974* (Berkeley: Eastwind Books of Berkeley, 2009), 122; Katheryn E. Wilson, “‘Same Struggle, Same Fight’: Yellow Seeds and the Asian American Movement in Philadelphia’s Chinatown” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 140, no. 3 (2016): 423; Lori K. Lopez, “The Yellow Press: Asian American Radicalism and Conflict in *Gidra*,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 35, no. 3 (2011): 239.

39 Renqi Yu, *To Save China, To Save Ourselves: The Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance of New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 5.

capitalism, or imperialism.⁴⁰ The concept of a homeland, while often embodied by the PRC, was yet to be defined and understood and highly up to interpretation.

***Imagining the Mutual Homeland: Between Myths and Reality
Theorizing A Political Agenda***

As the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s broke out in the PRC, the ROC launched a movement of reviving traditional Chinese culture and claimed Taiwan as its legitimate heir. Yet, the notion of cultural and historical homeland suggested by this movement worked against the KMT and further convinced student activists to embrace the PRC where Chinese culture rooted in.⁴¹ In fact, it was quite typical for students to become motivated to learn about socialist theories as they attempted to flesh out the image of Red China.⁴² For some, this conversion was not purely voluntary: “Many students from Hong Kong and some older students from Taiwan were touched by Maoism and the anti-war movement. They often told us how bad the KMT was. When I just arrived, I couldn’t believe anything they said, so I got into debates with them. To back up my argument, I went to the East Asian Library to read, to read the Communists’ books—I think many people shared this experience.”⁴³ Books such as Karl Popper’s *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Franz Schurmann’s *Ideology and Organization in Communist China*, and Edgar Snow’s *Red Star Over China* emerged as the “bibles for overseas students to learn about homeland.”⁴⁴

Meanwhile, Chinese American activists held mixed opinions towards developing a theory of their politics and conception of the homeland. Some also emphasized a solid theoretical basis for their activism. Asian Study Group, one of the lesser-known

40 Junxiong Hua, interview by Yaming Li, May 5, 2009, transcript, <http://archives.lib.nthu.edu.tw/diaoyun/history/06.htm>.

41 Cheng-chieh Chang, “How Do Wind and Thunder Echo? A Comparative Research Between Taiwan’s ‘Baodiao Literature’ and Japan’s ‘Zenkyoto Literature,’” *Chung Wai Literary Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (2019): 98.

42 Lin, Chen, and Su, 159-160.

43 Liu, interview by Xie, Li, Cai, Oct. 24, 2008.

44 Yaming Li, interview by Xiaocen Xie, Yawen Li, and Hongyin Caix, July 4, 2009, transcript, <http://archives.lib.nthu.edu.tw/diaoyun/history/01.htm>; Daren Liu, 神話的破滅 [Demystifying A Myth] (Taipei: Hongfan Publishing, 1992), 42, in Xiao, 258.

groups with wide ideological reach, was conceptualized by Jerry Tung using his knowledge of Lenin's ideology and the work of Soviet economist Plekhanov.⁴⁵ On the other hand, pursuing full proficiency with socialist theories was not always practical or desirable. For youths busy with solving day-to-day problems neighborhood issues, it was challenging and often unfeasible to adjust their activities to adhere to grand Communist claims. Steve Yip, the leader of Wei Min She, admitted that ideologically, "WMS continued to focus on the local community, rather than anti-imperialist issues; [...] It took the group about a year to [...] become more 'internationalist' in outlook."⁴⁶ Limited education also proved to be a barrier to street-youth groups. Many Red Guards were not so comfortable with the abstract, philosophical readings. Though they had formed a joint study group with the Panthers, they resisted associating profound theories and big names with their practical, community-oriented programming.⁴⁷ Former Red Guard Greg Morozumi recalled his reaction when they merged with IWK and officially declared to be Marxist-Leninist-Maoist: "I was like what is that? [They said] We're gonna become communists! I said what?"⁴⁸

Chinatown activists combined American-styled activism with PRC materials. Even the less theory-based Red Guard Party articulated their missions with a sophisticated system of ten political programs, eight points of attention, and three main rules of discipline. The ten political programs were borrowed from the Black Panthers and Young Lords, who were inspired by Maoist pamphlets in the Cultural Revolution.⁴⁹ The Red Guards' version was dedicated to solving a series of community concerns, including housing crises, police brutality, legal justice, employment, and medical care. The list also went beyond Chinatown issues to claim that the U.S. should recognize the People's Republic of China because Mao was "the true leader of the Chinese people."⁵⁰ The

45 Wei, 217.

46 Ibid., 210.

47 Zhao, 16.

48 Ibid., 35.

49 Pulido, 282-284.

50 "Red Guard Program and Rules (1969)," Encyclopedia of Anti-Revisionism On-Line. Accessed Oct. 18, 2019. <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-1a/red-guard.htm>.

eight points of attention and three main rules of discipline were almost directly copied from the rules of the People's Liberation Army drafted in 1947.⁵¹ Even phrases such as “do not damage [...] crops of the poor, oppressed mass” and “turn in everything captured from the attacking enemy” were kept unchanged though they clearly did not fit in the context, which implied the activists' pride of their militant nature. By mirroring the Chinese Communist Revolution, Chinatown activists asserted the significance of their mission.

Co-Creating the Image of Homeland

In a time when travel to China was almost always prohibited, the observations and insights from a handful of visitors were taken seriously by everyone interested in the PRC's development, optimistic or skeptical. Some Taiwanese students, Chinese American scholars, and IWK members were invited to witness agricultural, economic, and revolutionary achievements in their homeland. Chunsheng Wang was very excited when she visited China in 1971 as one of the first team of five overseas patriots. She was warmly welcomed by the PRC Premier and had a six-hour late-night conversation with him, further emboldening her peers.⁵² Ping-ti Ho, a professor at the University of Chicago, felt a similar excitement. He visited China and wrote the influential “Examining the New China's Characteristics and Accomplishments from a Historical Perspective.” As a renowned scholar, he was invited by Tiao-Yu Tai activists to deliver over forty talks at various universities.⁵³ Though the *Los Angeles Times* belittled his passionate praise for the PRC as naïve optimism blinded by excitement, students saw his article and talks as an objective presentation of a homeland that no one else could possibly know better.⁵⁴

Though access to first-hand knowledge of the PRC was usually limited to a few lucky visitors, pro-Communist students

51 Bill V. Mullen, “By the Book: Quotations from Chairman Mao and the making of Afro-Asian Radicalism, 1966-1975,” in *Mao's Little Red Book: A Global History*, ed. Alexander C. Cook. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 249.

52 Yu He, “Overseas ‘Baodiao No. 0 Group,’” 3.

53 Liu, “Political Culture of Taiwan Students Studying in the United States in the 1970s,” 15.

54 William F. Buckley Jr., “China Series Doesn't Tell Whole Story,” *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 21, 1971: B6.

and Chinatown activists actively sought out information about Red China. Statistical research on student activist publications concluded that around half of the articles were about political issues around mainland China, and the runner-up was Taiwanese politics.⁵⁵ Many articles were selected and translated from Western journalist reports or Leftist commentaries, which were often politically biased. Similarly, in addition to commentary articles, the bilingual newspapers by the IWK, Red Guards, and Yellow Seeds often updated their readers with news about the Cultural Revolution, daily life in China, and the signs of Sino-American Normalization. These articles, which reported everything from ping-pong games between China and the U.S. to the liberation of Chinese women, were “appealing to a wider audience in Chinatowns for readers who sympathized with the PRC but were apprehensive about being as politically vocal as the young members.”⁵⁶

Most activity centers had already hosted regular film screenings, a tactic quickly adopted by activists to spread the knowledge of the homeland in an accessible and entertaining way. About twenty films and documentaries, ranging from state propaganda ones to Western productions, were screened on college campuses and Chinatown community centers, thanks to the independent efforts of both groups.⁵⁷ Students from up to thirty universities across the country circulated videotapes, and many organizations, such as the *Yellow Seeds*, raised funds for purchasing screening equipment.⁵⁸ Despite the costs and labor required, films proved to be effective tools for mobilizing crowds. The KMT was so concerned that, as an IWK member recalled, “[d]uring one screening of *East is Red*, a propaganda musical made for the Communist Party in 1965, KMT agents firebombed the storefront and threw garbage at viewers from the roof.”⁵⁹

Narrating a Yellow History

55 Yushan Liu, “The Analysis on the Phenomenon of “Sinophile” among Taiwanese Students in the United States in 1970s,” *Youth Studies* (2016): 83.

56 Zhao, 41.

57 Yushan Liu, “Political Culture of Taiwan Students Studying in the United States in the 1970s—A Case Study of Diaoyutai Movement,” *Journal of Southwest Jiaotong University (Social Sciences)* 16, no. 4 (2015): 17-18.

58 “Names of Philadelphia Patriotic Overseas Chinese Who Gladly Donated to Purchase Video Player,” *Yellow Seeds* 1, no. 6, Sept. 1973.

59 Zhao, 27.

The imagined homeland needed a place not only in current affairs but also in global history curricula. Neither activist group found its school's curriculum satisfying. Tiao-Yu Tai activists wondered what caused China to fracture into two in the first place. Back in Taiwan, propaganda, hostility, and lack of access to perspectives other than the KMT's official explanation blocked them from learning about the full history of China. A dialogue in former activist Daren Liu's *Wind and Thunders from Afar* (2010) highlighted their confusion:

“(Class? What Class? Does it have anything to do with our education in Taiwan?) You’re studying History, how can you not know about the ‘gap in history’? Let me ask you in this way, is the history from May Fourth to 1949 mentioned in our textbook? Taught by our teachers? The revolutionary change during these thirty years is something none of us know anything about. If this isn’t brainwash, what is it? The first step of study groups, nothing more advanced than catching up with that.”⁶⁰

Exposure to a variety of interpretations of modern China was, therefore, vital to support their arguments about where the homeland should be.

While Taiwanese students started to reconstruct the past without the interference of ideology, Chinese Americans strived to understand a colored history, specifically a Yellow history, that had been overlooked in the American school curriculum. Alex Hing complained that at a younger age, the “least white” history he ever learned was Ancient Egypt.⁶¹ These students passionately enjoined Chinese and Chinese American historians to study their past and, therefore, to establish the foundation of a solid, properly defined Chinese American or Asian American identity. For example, an anthology of the IWK journal *Getting Together* articles titled “Chinese-American Workers: Past and Present” included almost twenty stories and interviews to trace the life trajectories of different generations of Chinese immigrants.⁶² Immigrants who left the mainland before the fifties often contrasted the dark KMT rule that

60 Daren Liu, 遠方有風雷 [Wind and Thunders from Afar] (Taipei: Unitas Publishing Co., 2010), 56.

61 Ho, 281.

62 “Chinese-American Workers: Past and Present,” *Getting Together*, 1972.

they lived under to the now booming economy under the PRC. Like the Red Guards, IWK demanded a curriculum that “exposes the true history of western imperialism in Asia and around the world” and “teaches the hardships and struggles of [their] ancestors in this land.”⁶³

This call for narrating a Yellow history blurred the distinction between different Asian ethnicities. Chinese American activists often compared their hardships to the Japanese American internment during WWII, exemplified by a featured commentary article on *Getting Together*, “Learn from the Past for Struggles Today: U.S. Concentration Camps.”⁶⁴ Racialization also affected their attitude towards the Vietnam War. Many Chinese Americans were against the Vietnam War because they empathized with their Asian brothers and sisters. As Angela Zhao noted, this was “a change from African Americans’ strategy during the Cold War, in which civil rights activists advocated for a double victory campaign that would end racial inequality at home and promote democracy abroad.”⁶⁵ This disagreement with other civil rights activists suggested that Asian American activists had unified under the umbrella of pan-Asian hardship that were tightly connected with the fate of their “other” homeland across the Pacific.

Talk and Act Like a Comrade

Dress codes, language, and celebrations were other common methods of constructing a shared homeland between Taiwanese students and Chinese Americans. For instance, Tiao-Yu Tai activists designed “brightly colored buttons with a clenched fist on a map of China appear on campuses across the country as a new Chinese youth movement feels its pride.”⁶⁶ Another open display of ideology was the Red Guards’ Mao-style jackets. Scholars interpreted the Red Guards’ adoption of the Black Panthers’ special dress code as “a political statement that underlined their espousal

63 “IWK 12 Point Platform and Program,” *Getting Together*, May 1971.

64 “The World War II Imprisonment of Japanese in U.S. Concentration Camps,” *Getting Together*, June 1978.

65 Zhao, 30-31.

66 Frederic A. Moritz, “Status of islands fuels Chinese student activism in U.S.” *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 7, 1971: 11.

of the Panthers' racial politics.”⁶⁷ Simultaneously, Chinese activists added their own twists on this imagery: “Departing from the Panthers’ black leather jackets, the Red Guards donned Mao jackets to signify their political allegiance to Red China.”⁶⁸

Adopting Communist language was another way for students to declare their political affiliation. The Maoist Chinese Americans often mimicked the tone of Chinese newspapers during the Cultural Revolution, exemplified by IWK articles that often ended with the slogan “all power to the people.” In 1977, a year after Mao passed away, *Getting Together* reprinted its article, “The Current Situation and Our Tasks,” and included the all-capitalized editor’s introduction: “Long live the great, glorious and correct Communist Party of China! Eternal glory to our great leader and teacher Chairman Mao Tsetung! Mao Tsetung Thought will shine forever!”⁶⁹

While such language united different Marxist-Leninists groups, it could quickly stir discontent among the Chinatown public and even within Taiwanese students themselves. Thus, terms evoking communism were sometimes carefully avoided. Before the Tiao-Yu Tai movement became divided, the Taiwanese students insisted on bringing neither the ROC nor the PRC flags to the demonstrations on January 30 and April 10. Communist language such as “knock over” and “long live” were intentionally excluded from the slogans because such vocabulary was expected to represent “all Chinese people.”⁷⁰ Taiwanese activists who were more alert to Communism even avoided using the phrase “Chinese people” because it “has a special meaning to the Communists.”⁷¹ Strategic decisions of including or excluding such language were important to developing unity: the former with other colored

67 Daryl J. Maeda, “Black Panthers, Red Guards, and Chinamen: Constructing Asian American Identity through Performing Blackness, 1969-1972,” *American Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (2005): 1081.

68 Daryl J. Maeda, *Rethinking the Asian American Movement* (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), 109.

69 “Appendix: The Current Situation and Our Tasks,” *Getting Together*, 1976.

70 Li, interview by Xie, Li, and Cai, July 4, 2009.

71 Yuanjun Liu, “我所知道的留美学生保钓运动” [The Baodiao Activities among Taiwanese Students in America That I Know Of], in *A Time of Wind and Clouds*, ed. Shaw, 203.

Marxist-Leninists, and the latter with all Chinese and Chinese Americans.

Since the early 1970s, National Days commemorating both the PRC and the ROC were celebrated by overseas Chinese. In 1970, for the first time, “celebrations were held in Chinatowns in New York and San Francisco to mark the anniversary of the establishment of the People’s Republic of China.”⁷² A year later, activists coordinated a pro-Peking demonstration at the United Nations when the General Assembly session opened and later organized a reception to celebrate the 22nd anniversary of the PRC.⁷³ Later in 1973, Philadelphia Chinatown held its first celebration for the PRC.⁷⁴ Supporters for Taipei, however, resisted. They took “full-page advertisements in *The New York Times* and the *New York Daily News* to voice their opposition to seating Communist China in the United Nations” and celebrated the ROC’s National Day in Boston as usual.⁷⁵

“Only in America”

Homeland increasingly became an abstract concept for both groups. Communist China was the dream; America, the reality. In the eyes of Chinatown residents, oppressive authorities and capitalists outside of the bounds of their tightly knit community represented an imagined America. Over-policing, urban reconstruction, wars in Vietnam, and unfair treatment by employers embodied everyday interactions with the white, capitalist, anti-Communist America. Though the activists played a unique role in Chinatowns, they never quite managed to engage the Chinatown public. Ironically, according to an active member, the most important purpose of the IWK was “going to the masses to learn from them and serve

72 Frank Ching, “Peking Gains Favor with Chinese in U.S.,” *New York Times*, Feb 22, 1971: 1.

73 Frank Ching, “Peking Backers Here Stage Welcome,” *New York Times*, Nov. 12, 1971: 16.

74 “Philadelphia Chinatown Celebrated National Day for the First Time,” *Yellow Seeds* 2, no. 1, November 1973.

75 Ching, “Peking Gains Favor with Chinese in U.S.,” 14.

Lucinda Smith, “Residents of Chinatown celebrate ‘Nationalist’ day,” *Boston Globe*, Oct. 12, 1971: 3.

the people.”⁷⁶ It was no surprise that their opinions and lifestyles were unfavorable among the largely apolitical Chinatown population. Ben Tong documented a Chinatown resident’s angry response to one of their protests: “[H]ow many of these ladies who used to work in sweat shops are now owners of valuable properties and parents of college-educated, ungrateful, empty-headed ‘revolutionaries?’”⁷⁷ While their Marxist-Leninist ideas were not popular, some residents still recognized their efforts to shape a unique Chinese American identity. A journalist visiting the community concluded from his interview that “most older Chinese-Americans don’t like what they consider the militant tone of the literature being put out by growing numbers of young activist Chinese-Americans. But they do endorse the activists’ move to develop a kind of culture that is distinctly Chinese-American.”⁷⁸

To Chinatown activists, America was their actual home, yet they hated to admit it because the chaotic Chinatown could not possibly compare with fantasies of a booming Communist China. Chinese American author Frank Chin had an interesting encounter with the Red Guards when he taught a theater class: “[H]e directed Asian American students to act out some anti-Asian stereotypes, when a group of Red Guards took exception to the repetition of the offensive imagery. The Red Guard leader knocked Chin to the ground, yelling, ‘Identify with China!’ Chin countered, ‘We’re in America. This is where we are, where we live, and where we’re going to die.’”⁷⁹ Chin made a fair point in his rebuttal. America was the reality, and many came to realize that the PRC was never as great as they imagined after all. Only a few years later, it became increasingly common for Chinese-language newspapers to default to America as opposed to the ROC or the PRC as “my

76 Dao, Hua. “Two Roads: From Cricket Fighting to the Cultural Revolution,” *Amerasia Journal* 27, no. 2 (2001): 111-125. DOI: 10.17953/amer.27.2.1v7152h72t75032n.

77 Ben R. Tong, “The Ghetto of the Mind: Notes on the Historical Psychology of Chinese America,” in Kent A. Ono, ed. *A Companion to Asian American Studies* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 64.

78 Herman Wong, “Chinese-Americans: A Silent Minority,” *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 3, 1974: OC_B1.

79 Studs Terkel, *Race: How Blacks and Whites Think and Feel about the American Obsession* (New York: New Press, 1992), 311.

country.”⁸⁰ After the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, many Chinatown activists gradually abnegated their Marxist-Leninist belief and focused on Asian American civil rights. Realizing that America was their inevitable home, their movement gradually shifted away from their ancestral homeland.

Witnessing China’s reforms since the late 1970s, many previously anti-Communist Chinese Americans of the older generation still associated themselves with the PRC. A middle-aged San Francisco Chinatown worker Lew Wah Get explained to a *Gidra* journalist: “Whenever there’s a new movie down at Kearney Street, I go along with the other old people who want to pay their respects to their country. [...] Whether the nation is strong or not is not the question. The point is that he has given machines and highways to the people. [...] I’m Chinese and this makes me feel proud. The white man can’t look down on us any more.”⁸¹ Among the various achievements of the PRC, the older generation was most interested in those that benefited the people, as opposed to the state—those that boosted their confidence.

Yet political inclination in Chinatown remained ambiguous. In 1972, the PRC ping pong team’s trip to Los Angeles was enough to cause controversies.⁸² Such divides continued to exist until today. Just like a sarcastic comment in the *IWK* journal suggested, Chinatown was at most “sometimes united.”⁸³ The leadership of Chinatown had never been transferred from KMT representatives to PRC ones, though extreme hostility towards Communism was no longer the major concern of Taiwan or America.

The Tiao-Yu Tai activists also felt this paradigm shift in the relationship between the ROC, the PRC, and the U.S. Some visited the PRC soon after the movement, yet these visits often fractured the romanticized image of the homeland that they held dear. When an activist visited China for the first time in the eighties, it was too disappointing and disillusioning for him to process: “I was completely unable to imagine how those reports we listened to were

80 McCue, 276.

81 Victor Nee, “Chinatown Pioneer Looks Toward the Mainland,” *Gidra*, Dec. 1972.

82 Herman Wong, “Chinatown Divided on Red Team,” *Los Angeles Times*, Apr 20, 1972: A5.

83 “We Won’t Move!” *Getting Together* 1, no. 3, July 1970.

fabricated. [...] I find many sacred truths to be twisted lies.”⁸⁴ Many complained that the Party coordinated a clumsy performance to convince them that socialism was a superior ideology, yet poverty, persecution, and violence were hardly alleviated. To their dismay, the reality of the PRC was far from the image they had constructed across the Pacific.

Most activists, by that point, knew that their movement was motivated by lies and misjudgments. To some, it sounded almost absurd that a sovereignty dispute over a tiny, inhabitable island eventually drew their attention to the vast mainland that they had never visited. They regretted spending so much energy on a tiny island: “‘Territory’ should be tangible, yet now as I think about it, it’s really just abstract.”⁸⁵ Many gave up their privilege in Taiwan, and some even quit Ph.D. programs to be full-time activists. After the Cultural Revolution came to an end, many student activists were swallowed by confusion and frustration.

Though the Taiwanese activists were physically in the U.S., they were troubled by their dilemma with the homeland across the Pacific: “If I love that land, why did I leave? If I miss that land, why am I not going back?”⁸⁶ Some resolved this conflict by going back. Many elite Taiwanese students became prominent scholars and politicians in Taiwan, contributing to the formation of “the two major camps in the spectrum of today’s Taiwanese politics,” according to later historian Baofeng Xiao.⁸⁷ Some devoted to other forms of activism and became much more conscious about the history, politics, and identity crises in Taiwan.⁸⁸

Throughout the years, some embraced their new identity as Chinese Americans rather than Chinese in America. *Bridge*, a New-York-based magazine that “initially exhibited a Chinese

84 Wuzhong Xiang, “釣運的片段回憶並寄語青年朋友” [Moments in Diaoyun and Wishes For My Young Friends], *China Times*, no. 18, June 2, 1988, quoted in A-chin Hsiau, “Remember Diaoyutai Islands: Territorial Dispute, Nationalism, and Generational Memory of Nostalgic Intellectuals in Taiwan,” *Taiwan Historical Research* 24, no. 3 (2017): 172.

85 Ding, 76.

86 Hsiu-Mei Liu, “Displaced South and Imaginary Nostalgia: The Homeland Imagination in Chang Hsi-Kuo’s Fiction in the 1970s,” *Journal of Taiwan Literary Studies* 18 (2014): 252.

87 Xiao, 262.

88 Lin, Chen, and Su, 163.

nationalist political bent and envisioned itself as a vehicle for promoting unity among overseas Chinese,” started to gradually transform into a pan-Asian American publication by mid-1972.⁸⁹ Its target audience shifted from the “local, Chinese, and middle-class” to the “national, multi-ethnic, multi-class” one.⁹⁰ To some extent, the Tiao-Yu Tai movement that united “overseas Chinese of different political viewpoints” also helped establish a basis for an Asian American discourse.⁹¹

For some Leftist patriots, ironically, America eventually became their only home. Blacklisted by the KMT, they were condemned to gaze at their homeland from an intractable distance: “[They] found their imagined utopia vastly different from the reality. They were disenchanted yet blacklisted, so America became where they decided to self-exile. America was not just a concept, but a place to live and write about the distant homeland.”⁹² Their purest homeland had been something imaginary, emotionally salient yet physically distant; in the end, these activists became simultaneously disenchanted by their imagined utopia and disowned by their de facto mother country.

89 Daryl J. Maeda, “Forging Asian American Identity,” 195.

90 Ibid., 195-196.

91 Frank Ching, “Claims to Distant Isles Arouse Chinese Here,” *New York Times*, Jan. 30, 1971: 8.

92 Chang, 100.