



★ THE EAST IS ★
BLACK

COLD WAR CHINA IN THE
BLACK RADICAL IMAGINATION



ROBESON TAJ FRAZIER



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Cold War China in the Black Radical Imagination

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Cover art: Detail of “Dadao Mei di! Dadao Su xiu!”

(Down with American imperialists and Russian revisionists!), 1967.

Courtesy of the University of Westminster.

To Ebony, Seu, and my parents.

IN MEMORY OF

Julian W. Pyles

Doris Brooks Cheatem

Shawishi Monroe

And my grandparents, Pearline, Huelett, De Lois & Jay.

Contents



Abbreviations ix

Acknowledgments xi

INTRODUCTION: March of the Volunteers i

Part I. The 1950s: Losing China, Winning China 22

CHAPTER 1. Ruminations on Eastern Passage 37

CHAPTER 2. A Passport Ain't Worth a Cent 72

Part II. The 1960s: The East Is Red and Black 108

CHAPTER 3. Soul Brothers and Soul Sisters of the East 117

CHAPTER 4. Maoism and the Sinification of
Black Political Struggle 159

CODA. The 1970s: Rapprochement and the Decline
of China's World Revolution 193

POSTSCRIPT: Weaving through San Huan Lu 213

Glossary 221

Notes 225

Bibliography 277

Index 303

Abbreviations



CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCRG	Central Cultural Revolution Group
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CPUSA	Communist Party of the United States of America
FNLA	Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola; National Front for the Liberation of Angola
GLF	Great Leap Forward
GMD	Guomindang (China's Nationalist Party)
GPCR	Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution
MPLA	Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola; Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
PIC	Peace Information Center
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
UN	United Nations
UNITA	União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola; National Union for the Total Independence of Angola
USCPFA	U.S.-China People's Friendship Association
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Acknowledgments



As a preteen and adolescent, I spent portions of my summers and holidays helping my father rummage through and catalogue his deceased clients' belongings. An attorney who handles estates, wills, and probate, he is frequently left with the task of organizing and obtaining an accurate value assessment of his clients' assets. Years ago, this often meant using my slim and tall frame to squeeze through doorway openings crammed partially shut by boxes, climb through windows, or crawl through the dark passageways of attics, garages, and basements. Nine times out of ten the client was a hoarder, one of those people who you might see on television who has accumulated a treasure trove of random artifacts and goodies. I laugh now recalling my shock when on one occasion I found three extremely old pistols. The next day one of my father's colleagues confirmed that they were pre-Civil War weapons and were worth a serious chunk of change.

Leafing through someone else's belongings, usually in dingy, badly lit, dust-filled, cramped spaces—"the dungeons and tombs of the dead" is how I described them to my friends—gave me an intimate introduction to the archive as both immaterial and material. In these people's records, books, photographs, art, newspaper clippings, magazines, letters of correspondence, diaries, coins, plates, and other weird and interesting items were some aspects of the lives they lived, the communities and individuals with whom they identified and loved, and meanings through which they came to make sense of their existence and the periods through which they lived and struggled. Amid the age, decay, and chaos of their homes and the articles they valued, I was interacting with the past, present, and future—all at once. Coincidentally, around this same time of my life, my mother enrolled me in a Mandarin Chinese-language class.

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stilled in me the value of service, doing the right thing, and developing a strong sense of purpose. Mama B, you have supplied me with faith—that is, to know the power of God and our ancestors and to locate this energy and life-force in fellowship with those around me and in my love, work, and treatment of others. And Ma, you have given me the power and passion to imagine—to believe in my ability to express and manifest the creative thoughts, images, sounds, and sensations that oscillate and reverberate in my mind, body, and soul.

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Introduction

MARCH OF THE VOLUNTEERS



I've learned that my people are not the only ones oppressed. That it is the same for Jews or Chinese as for Negroes. . . . I found that where forces have been the same, whether people weave, build, pick cotton, or dig in the mines, they understand each other in the common language of work, suffering and protest.

— PAUL ROBESON

“Qilai! Buyuan zuo nuli de renmen!” (Arise! All who refuse to be slaves!), Paul Robeson sang on a moderately cool evening in 1940. Moments earlier, before an audience of seven thousand people, under the twilight of the Harlem sky, the baritone soloist walked downstage at the Lewisohn Stadium for his final song. This concert, like most others, had revealed the diversity of the thespian-activist’s musical catalogue. The set included “Ol’ Man River,” the landmark tune about dockworkers made famous in the play and film *Showboat*; “I Dreamed I Saw Joe Hill Last Night,” an ode to the early twentieth-century Swedish American labor activist and miner; and the classic African American spiritual “Go Down Moses” (commonly referred to as “Let My People Go”).¹ But to close the performance, Robeson opted to sing a new piece, albeit a song that had been sung over the course of the previous decade by troops in defiance of Japanese occupation. “I want to sing a song for the heroic Chinese people in battle,” he explained.²

Instructing the audience to “qilai!” (rise up), Robeson launched into “March of the Volunteers” (“Yiyongjun jinxingqu”), China’s anthem of resistance against Japanese and Western domination, a song later adopted as the Chinese national anthem:

Arise!

All who refuse to be slaves!

Let our flesh and blood forge into our new Great Wall!

The Chinese people face their greatest peril,
Every person is forced to expel his very last cry.
Arise!
Arise!
Arise!
Our million hearts beating as one,
Brave the enemy's fire,
March on!
Brave the enemy's fire,
March on!
March on!
March on!³

In time this song became part of Robeson's musical set, the singer prefacing it with criticism of the role that U.S. tax dollars and private interests played in sheltering the repressive leadership of the Chinese Nationalist Party, a staunch U.S. ally. On other occasions, he specifically directed the song's message toward African American listeners, emphasizing the song's antislavery theme. "It stands, I was told, for a spirit of fighting against mighty power," Robeson once remarked.⁴ "March of the Volunteers" ultimately crystallized his multiple avenues of support for Chinese self-determination. Throughout the 1940s Robeson raised funds for China's war campaign against Japanese occupation, served on behalf of United China Relief initiatives, and acted as an honorary director of the Chinese Defense League.⁵ This work led him to endorse the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and its middle-aged chairman, Mao Zedong, a revolutionary who called for the creation of new socialist society based around the will, determination, and creativity of Chinese peasants and the rural poor.

Robeson was not alone in advocating for China's autonomy. His support tied into a wave of expressions of African American radical solidarity with China. Quite a few blacks likened Japan's invasion of Nanjing in 1937 to Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, denouncing the encroachment of Chinese sovereignty. Just two hundred miles east of Nanjing, collaboration between the American trumpeter Buck Clayton and the composer Li Jinhui in the Shanghai music scene led to fusions of jazz and Chinese folk music. Across the waters, as the poet Langston Hughes urged China to "break the chains of the East," Robeson's "March of the Volunteers" collaborator Liu Liangmo used his *Pittsburgh Courier* column to gain support for the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act, a U.S. bill that restricted Chinese immigration and excluded Chinese residents from citizenship.⁶

Particularly noteworthy though are the different geographical locations, po-

litical contexts, and cultural ends from which Robeson's rendition of "March of the Volunteers" took life. It was broadcast through radio around the world when he sang it in Moscow in 1949 to commemorate the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), a country finally free from imperialism and capitalist domination. And in the 1950s the song's message was felt within the travails of the Korean War, where loudspeakers in prison camps transmitted Robeson's voice to Chinese soldiers and African American prisoners, some of whom used it to articulate racial and political connections across enemy lines.

Comparing the communicative power of musical performance to that of language, Robeson divulged: "Folk music is as much a creation of a mass of people as language. Both are derived from social groups which had to communicate with each other and within each other."⁷ Here he theorized the spaces of communication and collective struggle people built with other groups through song. Thus, as with most folk songs, "March of the Volunteers" embodied narratives of human struggle that extended beyond the external borders of national territories, confronting structures of injustice and difference near and far. Made into a sonic symbol of radical internationalism and a transracial signifier of the bonds described by the artist-activist in the epigraph above, Robeson's version of "March of the Volunteers" formed a connecting link between China's national struggle, black collective resistance against racial oppression, and a world movement against imperialism, white supremacy, and Western elite dominance.



MEDIA AND IMAGINING

The socialist thinkers and human-rights activists W. E. B. Du Bois and Shirley Graham Du Bois, the foreign correspondent William Worthy, the Marxist feminist Vicki Garvin, the militant freedom fighters Mabel and Robert Williams, and several black war veterans built upon Robeson's metaphor of shared struggle. From China and elsewhere, they imagined both themselves and Asian revolutionary movements with broad language and metaphors that reshaped the differences (geographical, historical, political, and racial) distinguishing China and other Communist Asian nations' struggles against imperialism from that of black Americans' struggles against social and economic injustice. These black radical travelers also drew attention to the entanglement of racial discrimination, capitalism, and U.S. empire by producing media that communicated "an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities, and perspectives." Through travel and the production of literature, newspapers, newsletters, pamphlets, radio, film documentary, and critical pedagogy, these

radicals “express[ed] opposition vertically from subordinate quarters directly at the power structure” and worked to “build support, solidarity, and networking laterally against . . . the very survival of the power structure.”⁸

This book offers a study of the political and cultural traffic fashioned by these people and the Chinese government between the years of 1949 and 1976. For one, I seek to explain how these radical internationalists deployed and grappled with media, travel, and travel narrative in their interactions in China and in their formulations of transnational politics. I argue that within their leftist radicalism, travels to China, and cultural representations of these experiences was a passionate commitment to interrogating and reframing dominant Cold War mappings of race, foreign policy, and world relations. Their media and travels additionally offer a valuable, although unquestionably bounded, porthole to the productive and controversial processes and acts of cultural creation that facilitated such connections. I maintain that unpacking both the fruitfulness and inconsistencies of this history of political solidarity and transnational media can help broaden understandings of U.S. and Chinese Cold War political cultures and the diverse cultural productions and representations that animated these cultures.⁹

By and large, the Cold War refers to the complex transformation of the international system primarily, but not solely, by the United States and the Soviet Union during the period of 1945–91. But the Cold War furthermore speaks to the immense productions of force, violence, ideology, and discourse through which consensus and ideas about modernity, national security, citizenship, and world relations were manufactured, circulated, reshaped, and rejected in different national, social, and geographical contexts. In the United States in particular, liberal democracy, discourses of “American exceptionalism,” and anticommunism promoted the image of “a new national and international ‘freedom loving’ subject”: U.S. nationals and foreigners whose freedom and self-determination could only be protected by containing and defeating communism’s expansion.¹⁰ Conflating communism with totalitarianism, representatives of government, business, media, and numerous civic and popular institutions deployed these discourses to interpellate Americans and non-Americans with a potent teleological construction of global affairs. The sum of these discourses was a national and supranational ideology of globality, a regime of power that the magazine publisher Henry Luce laid out in his famous 1941 article, “The American Century.” Distinguishing the post–World War II global order from the world system of imperialism that preceded it, Luce justified America’s transimperial project to reorganize world trade along the same lines as the United States’ existing economic system. Protection of free will and liberty within the marketplace and the voting bloc required ex-

panding America's political and economic model to the *grand area*—territory consisting of the Western Hemisphere, the remainder of British Commonwealth and its dissolving empire, the Dutch East Indies, China, Japan, and various African territories. “Tyrannies may require a large amount of living space,” Luce asserted, “but Freedom requires and will require far greater living space than Tyranny.”¹¹ His statement about the decentered and deterritorial aspirations undergirding the ideology of freedom and global capitalism of the United States amounted to the relaxation and outright removal of barriers separating national and international capital and the expansion of the U.S. military's power to penetrate the farthest corners of the world as global cop and enforcer. The postwar advance and secularization of U.S. global power therefore represented the reconstitution of an ongoing, long historical process inaugurated centuries earlier, a new stage in the capitalist world system's corporate and epistemological imposition of Western domination on other ways of life, thinking, and existence.

Composed of activists and thinkers of diverse ideological leanings, “the long movement” of African American struggle directly engaged this emerging global order, giving great effort to confront the limits of the welfare state, liberal democracy, racial discrimination, and the inequality and conditions engendered by capitalism.¹² The leftist and black-nationalist internationalists of this contingent represented one of the most dynamic U.S.-based forces against the systemic violence and exploitation generated by domestic racial oppression, global white supremacy, Western imperialism, and the expansion of global capitalism, militarism, and corporate injustice by the United States and its allies. Opposed to U.S. imperialism abroad and capitalism and antiblack racism at home, black leftist radicals such as Worthy, Garvin, the Du Boises, and the Williamsses made it known that the social and economic treatment of black Americans and racial minorities in the United States amplified the inadequacies of the country's paradigm of international relations and world community. These radicals additionally challenged the primacy of liberal democracy and free-trade capitalism as the dominant ideology and model of modernity and sociopolitical economic development around which to organize U.S. life and the postwar international order. While many of their domestic liberal counterparts identified the fight against racism, social injustice, and economic exploitation as primarily a national issue that could be resolved through desegregation, legislative changes, fair employment statutes, and greater and gradual inclusion and access to the public and popular realms, radical internationalists called attention to the struggle's global dimensions and broader circumstances. They argued that the subjugation U.S. racial minorities endured was contiguous to the hardship, repression, and abuse felt by nonwhite

populations on the world scale; these complexes in their totality served the interests of capital accumulation, privatization, male supremacy, and a white-dominated power structure, that is, a system of racial capitalism.¹³ Cognizant of the transnational and global basis of racial capitalism's expansion, these activists-intellectuals resolved that combatting this system required not just political action at the local and national levels but additionally transnational and international assemblages capable of opposing and ending this injustice.

The Chinese people were one of numerous populations to which these black activists sought political ties. For some of them, China became what the leftist historian Max Elbaum has described as a "location-turned-emblem" that took on vibrant anticapitalist and antiracist meanings.¹⁴ Among other reasons, black leftist radicals perceived the CCP's elimination of foreign occupation and exploitation and its rhetorical commitment to peasant radicalism and social uplift as one of several viable globalist Cold War alternatives to a world fueled by capitalism and military expansion.¹⁵ Furthermore, these radicals understood that the growth of communism in China and other Asian territories posed a risk to America's access to new foreign markets, cheap raw materials and foreign labor, and foreign-located industries and sites to put Americans to work. China's socialist experiment and its brand of Third World Marxism, therefore, offered them one, though not the only, utopic model of economic democracy, mass political participation, and antiracist global modernity.

Simultaneously, the Chinese government worked to explicitly align itself and its anti-Western rhetoric with that of other exploited nonwhite populations. They centered China as the leader of an anti-imperialist world struggle against capitalism, U.S. empire, and white supremacy. And in this narrative, representations of black struggle, particularly that being waged by African Americans, were of serious importance. The Chinese government produced propaganda that unambiguously denounced U.S. racism and militarism and articulated China's support for black social movements. Moreover, in these portrayals, African American antiracist struggle was identified in anticolonial Marxist terms. It was depicted as an example of a larger decolonial wave that was subverting Euro-American dominance and instituting a new world order (see figure I.1). What's more, China's leaders recognized several Civil Rights and Black Power Movement activists and critics of U.S. foreign policy as *waiguo pengyou* (friends of China). Through political outreach and hosted stays in China, the Chinese leaders worked to proselytize and inculcate these select visitors with China's road to socialism and global revolution.

The formations through which African Americans and the Chinese government constructed such ideas, images, and emblems of transnational political community demonstrate the crucial work of *radical imagining* in engender-



FIGURE 1.1: “Wan’e de zhimin zhuyi, diguo zhuyi zhidu shi suizhe nuyi he fanmai heiren er xingsheng qilai de, ta ye bijiang suizhe heise renzhong de chedi jiefang er gaozhong” (The evil system of colonialism and imperialism arose and thrived with the enslavement of blacks and the trade of blacks, and it will surely come to its end with the complete emancipation of the black people), Mao Zedong, 1968. Courtesy of Ann Tompkins (Tang Fandi) and Lincoln Cushing Chinese Poster Collection, C. V. Starr East Asian Library, University of California, Berkeley. Also published in Tompkins and Cushing, *Chinese Posters*. Digital image courtesy of Lincoln Cushing/Docs Populi.

ing and nurturing practices of liberation and radical democracy in the face of global injustice and inequality. The imagination describes the interaction and transformation of hearts, minds, and souls into beings, subjects, and collectivities. It speaks to a person’s expressive and inventive capacity to render abstract visions, intentions, and drives into material processes, lifelike renderings, and socially grounded outcomes. Imagining here is thus displayed as a process of ideology that marshals and deploys cognitive faculties, consciousness, and social life for the process of contesting the worlds we inhabit and making and shaping them anew.¹⁶

It is with this definition that I begin to interrogate the functions of travel, political communication, cultural representation, and traditional media (print culture, radio, film, political cartoons, graphic iconography, and teaching pedagogy) in black radicals’ and the Chinese government’s constructions of “China,” “Chinese communism,” “black liberation,” “racial solidarity,” and “Third World internationalism.”¹⁷ Of chief concern is how these constructs were employed dialogically as sites of struggle and contestation against the dominant U.S. and Soviet frameworks of race, international relations, and Cold War geopolitics.

To consider this question involves engaging in comparative analysis and attending to the unique cultural systems and political processes that shaped and resulted from these African American and Chinese interactions and cultural productions. This means unpacking the ideologies (the concepts and material practices through which people represent, interpret, and make sense of social existence) and discourses (the signifying systems through which ideologies and subjectivities are learned, given meaning, and deployed) that animated black radicals' and the Chinese government's articulations and representations. What then becomes more apparent are the diverse content, symbols, and practices—what the historian Akira Iriye has termed “the ‘imagined’ nature of a given reality”—that black radicals and the PRC made use of to define and portray African American–Chinese connections, as well as how these depictions of internationalism were circulated and consumed by different publics.¹⁸

The empowering images and narratives of resistance fashioned by this group of radical travelers grew from rigorous, didactic unpacking of media's function as a site of power and knowledge production within racial capitalism. Black radicals grasped that media was a key mode of cultural representation through which U.S. racial and economic violence and ideologies of white superiority were legitimated. Media therefore was identified as an unavoidable site of antiracist struggle; it was a requisite for contesting oppression and reshaping the image of black people and other nonwhite populations throughout the world. Moreover, in these radicals' media, blackness was distinguished as a fluctuating node, or what the intellectual Stuart Hall has described as a “floating signifier,” through which to comprehend the connections between U.S. racism and Euro-American militarism and imperialism abroad.¹⁹ The scholar Jane Rhodes explains: “Blackness is not a fixed racial category, but part of a rather fluid and malleable set of representations that change meaning dependent on time, place, and context. . . . [It is] a floating signifier that is under contestation by media producers, media subjects, and media audiences.”²⁰ Along these lines, the Chinese government and the activists and thinkers detailed in this book produced representations of race and blackness that were African American and Chinese in tone, but nonetheless international and transnational in scope and cross-cultural in outreach and communication. In addition, these representations coalesced around arguments regarding the global parameters of capitalism and white supremacy, and new time-space-place mobilizations of group identity and human connectedness that linked peoples across borders of region, country, nation, language, and race.

The critical interrogation of mass media by this book's protagonists resembled that of the Frankfurt School scholar Walter Benjamin, who supplied a materialist and noninstrumentalist approach. Benjamin viewed media's form and

content as not disconnected from power and domination but rather as integral to their making and legitimization—that is, as a significant activity of living and means through which reality is manipulated and regulated. Political ideology and identity, he insisted, were therefore communicated in and with media rather than simply through it. It was consequently the responsibility of “the author as producer” to challenge such systems of subjugation and exploitation, her or his duty being “not to report but to struggle; not to play the spectator but to intervene actively,” which thus required culturally “re-functioning” mass communication and artistic production toward “a revolutionary useful value.”²¹

It was with this purpose that Garvin, Worthy, the Du Boises, the Williamses, and other black thinkers and media practitioners used media as a transnational political practice to impact people’s political consciousness. For these black radicals, media and technologies of representation were not simply descriptive; they were also inscriptive, capable of helping reshape human experience toward new modalities of perception and knowing. Media “signal[s] new subjectivities,” the media scholar Lisa Gitelman explains, effectively working to interrupt, “ratify, stretch, or commodify contemporary parameters of identity” and “new sense[s] of public existence.” The scholar Rubén Gallo agrees, noting that “technological media are not mere tools at the service of representation; on the contrary, they shape, define and determine the possibilities of representation.”²²

Exploring the media of black radical travelers therefore illuminates how these people both made use of and were impacted by media, exercises that aided them in ephemerally refunctioning the dominant racial and ideological mappings of the Cold War. They perceived the Cold War and Third World struggle as more than just ongoing geopolitical conflicts between various state powers and national liberation movements. The Cold War and Third World struggle were also discursive spaces represented and portrayed through visual, aural, and textual forms for different audiences. Media and cultural representation by the likes of Western governments and the Western press thus were essential in influencing American and non-American understandings of global affairs, primary agents in “organiz[ing] and reorganiz[ing] popular perceptions of difference within a global economic order.”²³ But through media and travel, black radicals also absorbed that Cold War cultural representation and production were vibrating with decolonial possibilities. The medium, these people maintained, could therefore have central influence in creating a message. Consequently for the people detailed in this book, one begat the other—media practices within acts of travel to China and political displacement became sources for the production of new kinds of power, knowledge, and political subjectivity and thus part of a praxis of producing transnational publics rooted in a collective, transcultural consciousness. With this black rad-

icals were afforded productive and challenging situations for contesting U.S. hegemony. Furthermore, they were able to rethink the frameworks and categories used to define the scope of their subject positions and that of different communities of color worldwide.²⁴

Still, while my original definition of imagining conveys the fertile inventiveness and creativity that animated these travelers' constructions of racial connection, what this definition does not highlight are the limitations, contradictions, and ambivalences that encompassed these radicals' politics of media, travel, and cultural representation. Considering how racial connection and racial difference were made and traveled across cultural lines through these people's circuits of media and political activity thus also requires distinguishing how the imagined content of their articulations coincided and failed to measure up with national and geopolitical realities abroad. This means interrogating the dissonance of imagining—namely the divergences between how cultural identification and relation were seen in the mind's eye and how they manifested in the lived relations of these black travelers in China. It is to consider the problematic subjective and structural processes and social negotiations through which these people and the PRC fashioned radical political identities and sentimentalist investments.

So, for instance, one thing that must be taken into account is how claims and practices of political coalition and solidarity, whether conservative or progressive, are often organized around an imagined inclusiveness and wholeness—black Americans, for instance, as constituents of a global anticolonial majority, as members of a Third World whole. But such coherence and wholeness is chimerical. It is a product of what the cultural critic Rey Chow summarizes as “the process of loss, substitution, and identification that is at play in the formation of a subject” and the “dismemberment brought about by the imperialistic violence of Westernization” on subjugated peoples. The Chinese government's and U.S. black radicals' constructions of racial connection and global struggle thus produced “a fetishizing imagining of a ‘China’ that never [was]”—political renderings whose musings, rhetoric, and iconography of cultural union frequently contrasted with the disorganized, unstable, and unequal features of these relations.²⁵ In the process, both U.S. black radicals and the Chinese government and people relied, at times, on reductive and essentialist depictions of Asian Communism and black-radical internationalism, images of racial internationalism and global Third World solidarity that reinscribed problematic, narrow understandings of transnational political connections and Chinese and African American life.

Such can be discerned, for example, by revisiting how the depictions of China propagated by both the Chinese state and the radicals examined in this

book revolved around dichotomizing China and the United States, and likewise their purported analogs of East and West. While this was intended to boost China's image among international parties, a looming question is to what domestic ends did such constructions serve? The comparative literature scholar Xiaomei Chen maintains that these dialectical imaginings—China and the East as the leader of world proletarian revolution and the United States and the West as the former's imagined Other—embodied “both a discourse of oppression and a discourse of liberation” that essentialized the West “as means for supporting a nationalism that suppresses its own people.”²⁶ Chen explains that by constructing Chinese communism as global capitalism's antithesis, Chinese communists, particularly Mao's radical-leftist following in government, instilled socialist ideological control over Chinese publics and people who struggled against the CCP and Mao's rural revolutionary approach. Thus, in a similar vein as the rigid binary of East-West depicted by the United States and its allies, the ideology of Eastern liberation articulated by Mao, the CCP, and other China supporters did not represent an empirical reality but rather embodied a discourse as a means of power. Through it, the Chinese government and society disciplined and domesticated Chinese citizens with the ideological hegemony of the party-state and Mao's philosophical dominance. One component of this project was exploiting and rescripting the racial dynamics of the United States and foreigners' racial imaginaries of China. Race consequently became a primary lens through which China differentiated its model of global power from that of the United States and the Soviet Union, influenced oppressed populations of color, and increased the aura and power of Chinese communism on Chinese citizens.

Black-radical travelers participated in this Chinese project of international influence and domestic hegemony. Their voices, bodies, and reification of the East and West helped China's influence grow both at home and abroad, effectively increasing the ideological power of the CCP as a central agent in the making of a progressive global future. But simultaneously black radicals' inclusion and contributions to this narrative helped conceal the Chinese government's repressive domestic practices and policies and the PRC's efforts to build nationalist support among Chinese citizens by any means. “Mao fully understood that only when China's superior moral position in the world had been recognized by other peoples would the consolidation of his continuous revolution's momentum at home be assured,” the historian Chen Jian asserts.²⁷

Alongside consideration of these contradictions, this book also genders black radicalism. I unpack the influence of attitudes and structures of gender on both Chinese and black radical constructions of racial internationalism and anticapitalist struggle. For example, the Chinese government and radicals such

as W. E. B. Du Bois and Robert F. Williams circulated gendered constructions and metaphors of racial solidarity, interstate conflict, defense of the nation, socialism, national liberation, and Third World struggle. In these radicals' articulations, the race, the Third World, and radical Afro-Asian partnership were often depicted through language, imagery, and symbols that privileged male intellectual production and agency over that of women, and through metaphors of interracial romance and racial kinship that were skewed in favor of reproductive heteronormativity—the heteronormative male was thus frequently treated as the anchor and stimulus of international revolutionary struggle.²⁸ This was also the case even when women were featured in black-radical and Chinese renderings of revolutionary internationalism and Afro-Asian solidarity. In many of these representations and articulations, female agency and femininity conformed to male standards; subversive women were dominantly framed in hegemonic masculine and heteronormative terms.

The East Is Black therefore deems it imperative to interrogate the different mechanisms and manipulations of gender through which black leftist travelers to China and the Chinese government demarcated the transnational and international realms as “a space of men desiring.”²⁹ Throughout the twentieth century, various tropes of African American political agency—the black sovereign, the charismatic race leader, the laborer at sea, the black worker, the soldier, the Pullman porter, the musician and visionary artist, the militant insurrectionist, the martyr—have been invoked as masculine. This was also the trend among some black travelers to China. Various people mobilized the aforementioned tropes and other signifiers, often negating the plurality of African American and Chinese women's radical thinking and internationalist investments. However, these male-heavy renderings were not the only images and discourses articulated and shared by this group. The black feminist socialists Shirley Graham Du Bois and Vicki Garvin prioritized female revolutionary internationalism on its own terms and interrogated the relationship between racism, capitalism, and patriarchy. Of particular interest is how these two women mobilized depictions of political transgression that challenged both liberal and Marxist-Leninist gender conventions and that did not betray a parochial U.S.-centric feminist narrative.



CHINA AND BLACK-RADICAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

The East Is Black is in conversation with several bodies of literature, most centrally scholarship on twentieth-century black internationalism, African American radical media, and Chinese political communication with foreign groups.³⁰

The past two decades have witnessed a growing wave of studies that examine African American contributions to U.S. foreign affairs, as well as works that frame the U.S. Black Freedom Movement from an international perspective. This scholarship has challenged international relations' general shortsightedness concerning the global implications of race-related issues and struggles.³¹ Simultaneously, historians have highlighted the international and diasporic labor of black Marxist-Leninists and socialist-oriented nationalists during the Cold War. These scholars' intellectual work has been invaluable and insightful, particularly in light of the fact that mainstream U.S. accounts of both the Cold War and black struggles for freedom continue to ignore leftist and militant histories, as well as the depths of black intellectual outreach and participation in political and cultural movements outside U.S. borders.³² The correspondence, words, and images fashioned by and between African American radicals and China have suffered a similar fate. Minus the attention supplied by a few historians and political scientists, the variant of Third World Marxist-Leninism and socialism advocated by black-radical travelers to China has been cast aside to the dustbin of history.

My consideration of this underexplored subject is indebted to Shelley Streeby's and Cynthia Young's recent intellectual contributions. Streeby supplies a dynamic model of transnational radical cultural history where visual analysis and critique take center stage. Filled with political cartoons, linocut prints, portraits, newspaper clippings, photographs, and more, her book *Radical Sensations: World Movements, Violence, and Visual Culture* (2013) details the new forms of media and visual culture cultivated by North American-based radical world movements during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Young's *Soul Power: Culture, Power, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* (2006), likewise, gives attention to a diverse range of radical cultural production. She argues that for the generation of U.S. leftists and nationalists whose radical consciousness came of age during the 1960s and 1970s, practices of media and travel engendered a "time-space compression that helped bridge geographic, ideological, and experiential gaps between U.S. minorities and Third World majorities" and which "in a very real sense, shrank the distance between national contexts and the people in them."³³ Building on Young's and Streeby's scholarship, I posit black radicals' media, visual culture, travels, political communication, and periods of residence in China as sources to unpack these people's and the Chinese state's attempts to translate their respective struggles to one another and, moreover, build a world movement capable of shortening the distance between political realities in China, the United States, and elsewhere. At its best, this political and cultural labor produced a radical crossroads where public diplomacy (what is often referred to now as "soft power"), anti-imperialist

militancy, advances in media technology, boundary crossing, and Third World leftist politics and identity intersected, albeit unevenly and at times in a volatile manner. But it was in these encounters that the people examined in this book expanded on their visions of radical democracy and contested the ideological dominance of liberal bourgeois conceptions of democracy, the latter of which has little trouble defining democracy alongside free-market capitalism and white supremacy.

The East Is Black is also influenced by and pulls from historiography invested in challenging previous scholarship's masculinist framing of Cold War black-radical intellectualism. The male-dominant arch of scholarship on twentieth-century black radicalism and, furthermore, the masculinist logics embedded in twentieth-century black radical and internationalist thought and cultural production often goes without mention.³⁴ Critical of both tendencies, black feminist scholars have highlighted how black women remain at the margins of both historiography and critical theory on African American radicalism, an erasure that mirrors that of Third World women activists within many Cold War historiographies. Black feminist scholarship has thus pushed for more nuanced and critical awareness of the complex contours of gender in discourses and practices of black radicalism and internationalism.³⁵

I am motivated by a similar impulse; therefore a fundamental premise of this book is the productive and problematic gendered terms and representations through which black radicals and the Chinese government constructed discourses and strategies of black-Chinese solidarity. As with master U.S. nationalist narratives that allocate private life to the feminine and the different spheres of public life (which include international relations and interstate politics) to the masculine, W. E. B. Du Bois's, Robert and Mabel Williams's, and William Worthy's narratives of black radical internationalist resistance fell prey to identifying anti-imperialist struggle as a space primarily composed of men.³⁶ Although they never said this explicitly, their media and writings reveal that they often assumed direct associations between radical internationalism, anti-imperialist struggle, and masculinity. In contrast, Shirley Graham Du Bois and Vicki Garvin actively sought to present a more multifaceted and gender-balanced depiction of black internationalism and Chinese communism—their arguments in line with the PRC's "Women Hold up Half the Sky" edict that people could not upend imperialism without also ending the exploitation and oppression of women. Examining these black travelers' gendered renderings of black-Chinese solidarity and political communication, and, furthermore, the distinct ways gender and sexuality structured the Chinese government's and people's conduct toward these black visitors, can broaden understandings of the varying specifics of identity, subjectivity, and location—nation,

race, class, and gender—raised by these people within the context of China’s political outreach to foreign publics. *The East Is Black* thus takes very seriously scholar M. Bahati Kuumba’s assertion that “social movements are also sites for ‘gendering consciousness,’” where radical thinking and social resistance “foster awareness of gender roles and relations even when the target and ultimate objectives of the movement have nothing to do with gender equity.”³⁷

Exploring this history moreover entails thinking across disciplinary boundaries, which has thus far been a productive, though nonetheless extremely flawed, enterprise and challenge within East Asian studies, international relations, political science, and African American studies.³⁸ For example, a fundamental shortcoming of the first three fields has been the marginalization of decolonization as a constitutive feature of Cold War Chinese political communication. In addition, by frequently privileging states and interstate activities as the primary units of analysis in considering Chinese foreign affairs, international relations and political science scholarship have given insufficient consideration to the cultural and social dimensions of Cold War Chinese politics. East Asian studies scholarship in contrast, especially works published in the last two decades, has tended to this gap. Various works have explored different facets of Cold War Chinese political culture, supplying intriguing information regarding the importance of propaganda posters, radical literature and pamphlets, education, art, opera, music, sports, advancements in scientific technology, and outreach to foreigners in broadening the CCP’s base and securing Mao’s cult of personality. But like international relations and political science, much of this scholarship has said little about China’s outreach to African American publics or about how ideologies of race and racial internationalism took shape within China’s Cold War foreign policy.³⁹ Among African American studies scholarship, on the other hand, several works have interrogated black engagement of China and Chinese Communism. This scholarship has helped counter the problematic nation-state parameters (rather than diasporic parameters) through which African American political culture is conventionally framed. However these works heed little attention to the explosive and intriguing dynamics of Chinese political culture and communication with foreign populations. In a nutshell, after poring over these works, what readers are left with is primarily a U.S.-centered narrative, where Chinese life and politics are difficult to locate, as are black experiences traveling and living in China.⁴⁰

Despite these shortcomings in scholarship, there are exceptions that should be mentioned. The political scientist Anne-Marie Brady, for instance, has supplied a fascinating analysis of China’s policies toward Western foreigners and these foreigners’ experiences navigating China’s treacherous political waters. Her fellow political scientist Vera Fennell and the historians Yunxiang Gao and

Matthew D. Johnson have also called attention to their fields' deafness to China's relations with black Americans and to issues of race and racial internationalism within Chinese history and China's Cold War foreign policy. Along similar lines, the scholars Jamie Monson's and G. Thomas Burgess's works on China's relations with Tanzania and Zanzibar offer intriguing portals into how China negotiated issues of racial and cultural difference in its aid projects in Africa, as well as how African radical nationalists and communists refashioned Maoism and Chinese history to suit futurist discourses framed around nation building, Afro-Asian partnership, and provincializing the West. Furthermore, the historian Judy Tzu-Chun Wu has recently explored the Cold War international journeys of numerous Americans to Vietnam, examining the radical connections and collaborations forged between these travelers and several Asian thinkers and organizations. Wu's framing of these relations as embodying a particular form of "radical orientalism" ties into the images of political solidarity forged by the Chinese government and the people considered in this book. In a similar fashion, both groups' representations relied on empowering and romanticized depictions of anti-imperialism, images and discourses that at times reinscribed problematic, essentialist depictions of Asians and African Americans.⁴¹

Ultimately, like these latter works, *The East Is Black* attempts to wed histories and political cultures that are too frequently assumed to be separate and unrelated. African American and Chinese history, media studies, visual analysis, cultural theory, diaspora theory, and gender theory therefore aid me in capturing the richness of black travels and representations of Chinese communism and anti-imperialist internationalism. But my assessment also does not shy away from the incongruities, conflicts, and violence that mired these relations and depictions of solidarity. This book consequently underscores both the ambivalence and fecundity of black-radical travelers' acts of global race making. In so doing, rather than reproducing an uncritical celebration of the imagination as solely a transgressive political practice, my analysis calls for "the imagination to be tough enough to test its own limits," specifically those instances when imagining has "provide[d] alibis for new civilizing missions, [and] mak[ing] us mischoose our allies."⁴² It is with consideration of these issues that I situate black radical media and travel representations of China as facilitating particular imaginings of collective identity and solidarity (Afro-Asian, antiwar, nonalignment, Third World guerrilla, and Third World feminist, for instance). These were formations that unlocked new points of identification and alternative arrangements of time, space, place, and race. To put it plainly, they resulted in the construction of a China of black radical imagining—a rendering of China, Asian Communism, and racial internationalism, albeit problematic, that was suited toward galvanizing both black Amer-

ican and Chinese publics within specific black radical and Chinese understandings of anti-imperialist, multiracial, transnational community.

Through this history of negotiations and ambivalence, contestation and contradiction, this book finds its name, the title an appropriation of the extravagant Chinese opera and song “Dongfang Hong” (“The East Is Red”). The song for a brief period of the 1960s replaced “March of the Volunteers” as China’s national anthem. It was a consequence of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR), an immense social struggle that upended Chinese life yet secured Mao’s power and doctrinarism over the CCP. Lyrically, “The East Is Red” equated China to the rising sun, whose brightness above the horizon denoted Mao and the party’s rise to power and importance in restructuring the world political landscape. Today, though, “The East Is Red” is a reminder of the harsh violence and injustice constitutive of Cold War Chinese life, a society where both the government’s and other institutions’ revolutionary rhetoric and ideology often masked reactionary positions and wide domestic political divides.

Similarly, this book’s title signifies not just the achievements of political coalition but also the inconsistencies and failings of these relations—the disjunctive and ambivalent contours of transnational radical imaginings. The idiom *dongfang hei* (the east is black) then both foregrounds and disassembles some of the articulations and representations that resulted from African American radicals’ encounters and media representations of China. Beyond conveying how these activist-intellectuals situated China within their media significations or how the PRC publicly supported blacks’ struggles, the idiom gestures toward the ambiguities and incongruity that inhabited these claims, how geopolitical and national realities clashed with the rhetoric and discourses of international coalition. Within these signs and articulations were patchy asymmetries, misperceptions, missteps, and points of miscommunication. Ultimately, what is revealed is that racial internationalism and the political imaginaries through which such formations are produced have their limits; national and cultural differences and the subject positions of radical internationalism’s shapers frequently demonstrate the ideology’s unevenness and inevitable points of friction.

In the end, I posit travel narratives and media representations of China, Asian communism, and African American–Chinese solidarity as significant, though misleading and erratic, practices of Cold War black radical imagining. Such can be discerned by examining the image with the caption “Dadao Mei di! Dadao Su xiu!” (Down with American imperialists and Russian revisionists! [1967]; see figure I.2). The men’s red armbands signify the Red Guard, the GPCR’s violent youth forces, whose lawlessness brought devastation to Chinese life. In addition, both men clasp copies of *Mao zhuxi yulu* (Quotations



FIGURE 1.2: “Dadao Mei di! Dadao Su xiu!” (Down with American imperialists and Russian revisionists!), 1967. Courtesy of the University of Westminster.

from Chairman Mao Zedong [1964]), what came to be known globally as “the little red book.” Underlying this image of international solidarity was the lionization of Mao and his communist model, a depiction that veiled the disastrous policies of an extremely repressive totalitarian government and its guerrilla-philosopher leader, a man who evolved into both an international icon and a calculating demagogue. Such contradictions were part and parcel of China’s rhetoric of Asian-African internationalism. China’s universalist framing of world proletarian revolution negated the differences of colonial history and internal conflict (racial, ethnic, and class-based dynamics unique to each specific location) that distinguished third-world countries from one another, as well as the different postwar conditions and national realities to which these countries’ populations were compelled to contend. And just as China’s claims and representations of international solidarity were limited and problematic, black radicals’ articulations could also be extremely narrow. Reliant upon U.S.-based definitions of blackness and versed in neither Mandarin language nor the different ways arguments about race and perceptions of blackness operated in the Chinese context, they found themselves lost in transit, translation, and selective perceptions, periodically romanticizing developments in China and elsewhere. In addition, the uniqueness of their experiences did not override the reality of their displacement. U.S.-state repression and surveillance and the superintendence, control, and censorship instituted by their Chinese host placed these radicals and their media under close watch and regulation.