

# The Everyday Cold War

Britain and China, 1950-1972

Chi-kwan Mark



B L O O M S B U R Y



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I dedicate this book to my late father, Mark Lam.



## Abbreviations

CAAC	Civil Aviation Administration of China
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCRG	Central Cultural Revolution Group
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COCOM	Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls
CRO	Commonwealth Relations Office
EEC	European Economic Community
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FO	Foreign Office
GMD	Guomindang
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China
NCNA	New China News Agency
PRC	People's Republic of China
ROC	Republic of China
SACU	Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
UN	United Nations

## Abbreviations in endnotes

BLO	Weston Library, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford
BT	Board of Trade

CAB	Cabinet Office
CUL	Department of Manuscripts and University Archives, Cambridge University Library
CWIHPB	<i>Cold War International History Project Bulletin</i>
CYN	<i>Chen Yi nianpu</i>
DEFE	Ministry of Defence
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FO	Foreign Office
FRUS	<i>Foreign Relations of the United States</i>
JFKL	John F. Kennedy Library
JWW	<i>Jiemi waijiao wenxian: Zhonghua renmin gongheguo jianjiao dang'an</i>
JYMZJW	<i>Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong junshi wengao</i>
JYMZW	<i>Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao</i>
JYZEW	<i>Jianguo yilai Zhou Enlai wengao</i>
LBJL	Lyndon B. Johnson Library
MZD	<i>Mao Zedong on Diplomacy</i>
MZN	<i>Mao Zedong nianpu</i>
NA	National Archives and Records Administration, United States
RG	Record Group
SOASL	School of Oriental and African Studies Library
TNA	The National Archives, UK
XZWF	<i>Xin Zhongguo waijiao fengyun</i>
ZDZ	<i>Zhonggong dangshi ziliao</i>
ZEN	<i>Zhou Enlai nianpu</i>
ZEWW	<i>Zhou Enlai waijiao wenxuan</i>
ZRGWDX	<i>Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiaobu dang'an xuanbian</i>
ZWDW	<i>Zhongguo wenhua dageming wenku</i>

# Introduction

The Cold War in Asia was characterized by the standoff between the United States and the People's Republic of China, supported by their respective allies. It concerned how they confronted each other over Korea, Indochina and Taiwan in the 1950s and 1960s, and how, during the 1970s, their confrontation gave way to rapprochement. But China was also involved in the other Cold War with a traditional dominant power in the region – the United Kingdom. This Cold War took place on a daily basis. The 'everyday Cold War' was being waged not by military means but by negotiation. Negotiations involved not only formal face-to-face talks across the table but also informal contestation and struggle through diplomatic ritual, propaganda rhetoric and symbolic gestures. The everyday sites of contest were Asia, the Chinese mainland and the British colony of Hong Kong.

On 6 January 1950, the British government accorded diplomatic recognition to the newly founded PRC. The communist regime under Mao Zedong, however, did not reciprocate London's recognition, insisting instead on the opening of negotiation over the establishment of diplomatic relations. Formal negotiation commenced in March but was soon deadlocked over the question of Taiwan, as manifested in London's policy regarding China representation in the United Nations and the Hong Kong government's treatment of alleged Chinese national property in the territory. The negotiations came to an abrupt end in June, when the Korean War broke out and later China intervened to support North Korea against the American-led UN coalition including Britain. Anglo-Chinese relations did not improve until mid-1954, when, during the Geneva Conference on the Indochina crisis, Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden and Premier Zhou Enlai agreed on the exchange of *chargés d'affaires*. Nevertheless, to Zhou, Britain and China enjoyed merely 'semi-diplomatic relations', thanks to the Taiwan question. Since 1965 the escalation of the Vietnam War, the outbreak of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the Hong Kong riots, and the sacking of the British Mission in Beijing brought Anglo-Chinese relations to their post-1950 nadir. The British diplomats on the ground became virtual 'hostages' of their host government; so were a dozen British nationals residing in China.

It was not until 1971, when Mao was winding down the Cultural Revolution and beginning the process of Sino-American rapprochement, that the British and the Chinese seized the opportunity to begin serious negotiations over full diplomatic relations. On 13 March 1972, twenty-two years after the first round of talks, Britain and the PRC agreed to exchange ambassadors, opening a new chapter in their relationship.

Why did it take so long for Britain to establish full diplomatic relations with Communist China? How far was Britain's recognition of the PRC a policy failure? Were successive British governments willing to go to any length to 'appease' Beijing? How did the Chinese leaders perceive and deal with Britain and its empire following the 'century of humiliation'? Above all, what was the nature of interactions between the two powers that were neither real enemies nor permanent friends in the Asian Cold War? This book examines Britain's efforts at diplomatic normalization with China from 1950 to 1972, with a focus on the critical years since 1965. It argues that Britain and China were involved in the 'everyday Cold War' or a continuous process of contestation and cooperation, which allowed them to 'normalize' their conflict in the absence of full diplomatic relations. Through the 'normalization'<sup>1</sup> of the 'everyday Cold War', they were able to achieve some (if not all) of their respective policy objectives in the short and medium term, while leaving the door open for normal relations in the long run. Rather than a failed policy of 'appeasement', British decision makers regarded patient and persistent engagement with China as the best way of fighting the 'everyday Cold War'. It is necessary to begin with the concept of 'the everyday'.

## Everyday interactions and ritual

The concept of 'the everyday' or 'everyday life' is a highly contested one, but is generally regarded as possessing such features as 'ordinary', 'routine', 'repetitive', 'unreflexive' and 'business-as-usual'. Thus, the 'everyday life' refers to the mundane, repetitive and taken-for-granted beliefs, experiences, practices and relations of ordinary people.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, what appears to be ordinary and unimportant is indeed extraordinary and imbued with meaning. What facilitate everyday interactions are 'rituals' or 'symbolic actions' that communicate meanings, reinforce identity and construct power relations.<sup>3</sup> However small and stereotypical, symbolic acts and words, such as thanks and apologies, allow the

participants to treat each other with respect. They help sustain an 'interaction order' organized on ritual principles.<sup>4</sup>

Everyday rituals are essential to the construction and maintenance of national identity. National identity 'in its mundane manifestations' is as important as grand expressions of nationalism during, for example, independence day celebrations and crowning ceremonies. 'Grounded in the everyday, in the mundane details of social interaction, habits, routines and practical knowledge', the power of national identity depends on 'the habitual performances of everyday life', such as playing the national sport and cooking country cuisine. Only by repeatedly performing popular rituals will 'memory and identity become inscribed into the body' and identification with the nation be sustained.<sup>5</sup>

Ritual underpinned politics at all levels, from international diplomacy to city politics and village conflicts.<sup>6</sup> Scholars writing on the 'history of everyday life' have focused on how ordinary people struggled to survive in difficult political circumstances – for example, how ordinary Russians lived extraordinary lives under the totalitarian regime of Joseph Stalin in the 1930s; how the Germans in a divided Berlin survived material shortage and economic blockade in the early Cold War; and how poor peasants in post-independence India interacted with the 'everyday state' in charge of almost all socio-economic-political issues at the grassroots level.<sup>7</sup> Instead of seeking direct confrontation with the authority, the 'subaltern actors' resort to passive resistance, or what James C. Scott called 'the weapons of the weak', such as 'foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so on'.<sup>8</sup> Through small-scale political actions behind the scenes, 'the weak make use of the strong' for the sake of everyday survival.<sup>9</sup>

## The 'everyday Cold War' between Britain and China

The Cold War encounter between Britain and China was not dissimilar to the 'everyday' interactions of ordinary people. The relationship was not vital to the national interests of either Britain or China. Nor was it characterized by high dramas like the Berlin blockade and the Sino-American confrontation. Besides, the post-1949 power relationship between Britain and China was 'asymmetrical': preoccupied with Europe and constrained by the domestic economy, declining Britain was obviously a weaker power than the rising China in Asia. In view of this, Britain resorted to the (powerful) 'weapons of the weak' – diplomacy, defined as 'the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official

relations between the governments of independent states' by 'peaceful means'.<sup>10</sup> Traditionally, diplomacy or negotiation had been a main instrument of British foreign policy. In post-1945 Asia, Britain preferred peaceful negotiation to military confrontation. Instead of overt confrontation, the British relied on 'quiet diplomacy', an approach that sought to resolve disputes with their opponents behind the scenes with minimal publicity.<sup>11</sup>

China, too, opted for negotiation in its interactions with Britain. Significantly the Chinese Communists had a unique understanding of the notion of 'negotiation', grounded in historical-cultural factors and ideological considerations. Influenced by the Chinese traditional thinking of ying-yang on the one hand and Marxism-Leninism on the other, Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai saw negotiation as having dual aspects – cooperation and struggle. As Premier and Foreign Minister Zhou instructed his diplomatic staff, or 'diplomatic fighters', on the day of the official founding of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in November 1949: 'Diplomacy has two aspects: one is to unite, and the other is to fight.' 'Strategically' China should 'oppose' imperialist countries, but 'tactically' it could 'unite' with them on 'specific questions'.<sup>12</sup> Such an understanding of diplomacy was in line with the doctrine of united front, which encompassed both unity and struggle aspects.<sup>13</sup> In negotiating or struggling with their opponents, the Chinese Communists were firm in principle but flexible in tactics, distinguishing between principal contradictions (usually in relation to national sovereignty, which was a non-negotiable principle) and secondary contradictions (where tactical compromises were possible). They were 'patient' negotiators, in that negotiation was conceived in terms of an ongoing relationship. Agreement on a secondary issue did not mean the end of negotiation; rather, its implementation required further negotiation and was dependent on China's continuous assessment of progress on the resolution of the principal issue.<sup>14</sup>

In handling Sino-British relations, the Chinese Communists were largely influenced by the legacy of British imperialism and the imperative of the Cold War. In their view, capitalist Britain was a 'reactionary' state and yet an 'old colonial' power different from the United States.<sup>15</sup> As early as August 1946, Mao had suggested the existence of the 'intermediate zone' comprising capitalist, colonial and semi-colonial countries in Europe, Asia and Africa, which separated the two superpowers and had 'contradictions' with 'US imperialism'. To him, the United States (and the Soviet Union) would not unleash a third world war unless it had controlled the 'intermediate zone', including 'the whole of the British Empire'.<sup>16</sup> Mao's perception of Britain as a declining imperialist power with contradictions with the United States continued to evolve in the

1950s, and was formally crystallized into the concept of 'two intermediate zones' between late 1963 and early 1964.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, China would form a broadest possible international united front with Britain, situating within the 'second intermediate zone', in the struggle against the principal enemy, the American imperialists (and increasingly the Soviet 'revisionists').<sup>18</sup> While cooperating over some issues, China also needed to 'struggle' against Britain, which was in Mao's eyes a 'wavering element', because of its indecisive Taiwan policy.<sup>19</sup> Herein lay the strategy of both 'co-opting and fighting'<sup>20</sup> Britain in the 'everyday Cold War'.

The sites of the 'everyday Cold War' were threefold: Asia, China and Hong Kong. At the international level, Britain and China belonged to the opposing camps in the global Cold War between the two superpowers. Despite according diplomatic recognition to the PRC, Britain needed to maintain a 'special relationship' with America, particularly concerning the question of Chinese representation in the United Nations. Beijing condemned London for pursuing a 'two Chinas' policy and serving as Washington's subservient ally during the Korean War, the First Taiwan Strait Crisis and the Vietnam War. In view of London's 'insincere' attitude towards the New China, Beijing refused to establish full diplomatic relations with Britain, while finding every opportunity to exploit Anglo-American contradictions in Asia. China's 'everyday Cold War' against Britain was played out most frequently and vigorously on the mainland. After 1950 the British diplomats and the few British nationals in China became post-imperial hostages to fortune in a republic whose avowed aims were to destroy all the institutions and legacies of the British informal empire. The MFA sought to discipline the activities of British diplomats over such daily issues as interview and travel. Hong Kong constituted the third site of the 'everyday Cold War'. What was at stake was less the future of Hong Kong per se than the struggle over its 'political space'. In 1949 Mao had decided to leave the British colony alone due to its strategic and economic value in the then Chinese Civil War and later the Sino-American conflict. While using Hong Kong for intelligence gathering, propaganda and other purposes, Beijing was sensitive to any attempts by Washington and Taipei to turn Hong Kong into a 'base of subversion' against the mainland. As a result, the Chinese Communists and the British (together with other Cold War actors) contested and negotiated the use of Hong Kong's 'political space' on a daily basis.

The 'everyday Cold War' was marked by diplomatic ritual and symbolic propaganda. Ritual had occupied a vital place within the Chinese tradition and in early Anglo-Chinese encounters.<sup>21</sup> In imperial China, rituals helped to

differentiate the Han Chinese from barbarian races, stipulated proper behaviour in social interactions, and constructed the power and legitimacy of the ruling house.<sup>22</sup> As for early Sino-British contacts, the most famous, or infamous, example in which guest ritual (*binli*) had played a key role was the George Lord Macartney Embassy to Qing China in 1793. The insistence on the ritual of kowtow (three kneelings and nine bowings to the Chinese emperor) during Macartney's imperial audience, according to James L. Hevia, was not a deliberate humiliating and degrading move by the Qing court, but rather had more to do with the traditional Chinese way of treating foreign guests and expecting gratitude for the emperor.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, ritual activities could not be dictated by one party; instead, they involved 'negotiation of power relations' between both sides.<sup>24</sup> In other words, the real meaning and function of rituals could be accepted, appropriated or resisted by either party (just as Macartney had refused to perform the kowtow).

After 1949 Communist China similarly emphasized rituals in defining its identity and constructing power relations. 'In symbolism, rituals, and language,' wrote Lowell Dittmer and Samuel Kim, 'Beijing fostered the creation of an international socialist identity.'<sup>25</sup> Gone was, of course, the insistence of kowtow as a sign of subordination and loyalty to the new Chinese 'emperor', Chairman Mao. Nonetheless, the Chinese Communists were as protocol-minded as their imperial predecessors. Zhou attached great importance to the 'form' of diplomacy: every act of protocol or *li* towards foreign diplomats and foreign guests (such as a handshake) mattered to China's foreign policy.<sup>26</sup> As far as Sino-British relations were concerned, diplomatic ritual carried symbolic meaning and served useful purposes. Symbolically China performed rituals to assert its new identity and status vis-à-vis Britain following the 'century of humiliation' and to signal its displeasure at London's policy. By refusing to reciprocate London's recognition in 1950, Mao and Zhou wanted to symbolically communicate the principles of 'making a fresh start' and 'cleaning the house before inviting the guests': that the New China was in no hurry to establish diplomatic relations with capitalist countries until the government had destroyed all British imperialist institutions and influences on the mainland.<sup>27</sup> By refusing to exchange ambassadors until 1972, Beijing intended to signal that Britain, in supporting Taiwan in one way or another, fell short of endorsing the principle of 'one China'. From an instrumental point of view, the Chinese put protocol matters at the service of domestic politics and foreign policy, notably the upholding of national sovereignty and independence.<sup>28</sup> It was imperative for the MFA to constantly remind the British of China's sovereignty over Taiwan,



lest they would drift towards a de facto 'two Chinas' policy. On a daily basis, the British diplomats in Beijing were subjected to the ritual of Chinese protests and harassment.

Propaganda was part and parcel of China's 'everyday Cold War' against Britain. Mao's China was a propaganda state built on the Soviet model and the pre-liberation experiences, especially during the Yan'an years. Under the Propaganda Department of the CCP Central Committee, the propaganda apparatus at the national, provincial and county levels strove to indoctrinate and mobilize both party cadres and ordinary citizens for the cause of Mao's 'continuous revolution'.<sup>29</sup> International propaganda aimed at enunciating China's viewpoints to a foreign audience (and to a lesser extent enhancing the Chinese people's understanding of world events) was equally important. Zhou was heavily involved in both diplomatic and propaganda works, which were inextricably linked.<sup>30</sup> The channels of disseminating messages to Britain included publications like *Peking Review* (a political weekly English-language magazine) and *Shijie Zhishi* (a Chinese-language bimonthly magazine on world affairs), Radio Peking (which had one-hour daily English-language broadcasts to Europe in the 1960s), and the London branch of the New China News Agency (which published daily bulletins and supplied items to news agencies). But it was the *People's Daily* (*Renmin Ribao*), the organ of the Party Central Committee, that became the major instrument of China's international propaganda.<sup>31</sup> In their day-to-day work, the British and foreign diplomats in China translated its editorials and articles in order to decipher Beijing's official thinking.

China's everyday propaganda regarding Britain was repetitive and symbolic. The technique of repetition was essential to inculcating China's aims, principles and identity in its opponents. Until the mid-1960s, Beijing's international propaganda centred around propagating China's socialist achievement, firm support for national independence in the Third World, and promotion of friendship and cooperation among nations for the sake of world peace.<sup>32</sup> As far as Britain was concerned, the themes of economic decline, growing contradictions within the capitalist camp, and neocolonialism in the Middle East and Africa featured regularly in the editorials and articles of the *People's Daily* and in the content of magazines like *Shijie Zhishi*.<sup>33</sup> After Mao had unleashed the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in 1966, the propaganda machine was dominated by radicals such as Chen Boda and Jiang Qing. Under the influence of 'ultra-leftism', the *People's Daily* was now charged with the task of propagating Mao Zedong Thought and particularly the message of China being the 'centre of world revolution'. The tone and content of the paper became,

in retrospect, 'false', 'exaggerated' and 'hollow',<sup>34</sup> inflaming anti-foreign feelings and incidents. Besides, Beijing's anti-British propaganda amounted to 'symbolic communication': it often exploited seemingly 'mundane' issues to convey more significant hidden messages.<sup>35</sup> At the height of the Vietnam War, for example, the *People's Daily* seized upon the 'rest and recreation' visits to Hong Kong by American military servicemen to symbolically reiterate China's solidarity with North Vietnam in the midst of the Sino-Soviet split – a political message that was more important, and accurate, than Beijing's accusations of Hong Kong as an American 'base of aggression' against Hanoi.

From 1950 to 1972, Britain was confronted with the 'everyday Cold War' waged by China. Over time, the British became accustomed to the repetitiveness and predictability of Beijing's diplomatic ritual and propaganda rhetoric: the extraordinary became the everyday. As Hong Kong governor Alexander Grantham (1947–57) recollected, China was 'consistently unfriendly, but by 1957 we had become used to this as part of our normal existence'.<sup>36</sup> Commenting on an increase in the volume of Chinese propaganda attacks on Britain in 1956, the British chargé in Beijing, Con O'Neill, argued that 'so long as we intend to maintain possessions or influence in East or South-East Asia', he did 'not see how our relations with China can be other than fundamentally difficult and bad'.<sup>37</sup> Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd best depicted the character of the 'everyday Cold War' by suggesting, during the 1958 Taiwan Strait Crisis, that Anglo-Chinese relations would 'remain in a state of fairly normal badness'.<sup>38</sup>

## Book structure and outline

This book, then, examines Britain's policy and relations with China between diplomatic recognition in 1950 and the exchange of ambassadors in 1972. Using the 'everyday Cold War' as a framework of analysis, it explores how the British and the Chinese contested and negotiated the United Kingdom's role in the Sino-American confrontations in Asia, the status of British diplomats and private nationals in the New China, and the use of Hong Kong's 'political space'. There have been a number of academic monographs on Anglo-Chinese relations in the late 1940s and the 1950s, addressing such topics as British policymaking regarding the recognition of the PRC, the collapse of the British economic 'empire' in China, Anglo-American-Chinese interactions in the Cold War, and Britain's Taiwan policy.<sup>39</sup> The only comprehensive account of Anglo-Chinese relations beyond the 1950s was published forty years ago.<sup>40</sup> A more recent study

examines Anglo-American relations with regard to China, albeit with a focus on US policy.<sup>41</sup> This book thus fills an important void in the existing literature. While starting with the year 1950, it privileges the under-studied and critical period from 1965 to 1972, during which Britain and China reached the nadir of their relationship and then moved in the direction of full normalization.

The formulation of China policy was the responsibility of the Foreign Office (the Foreign and Commonwealth Office after 1968), particularly its Far Eastern Department. While the Cabinet and its committees (e.g. the Cabinet Defence Committee between 1946 and 1963 and the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee since 1964) made final decisions, it was the specialists in the Far Eastern Department and the British diplomats in China who played key roles in drafting policy papers and making recommendations for ministerial approval. As foreign secretaries, the likes of Ernest Bevin (1945–51), Anthony Eden (1951–5) and Alec Douglas-Home (1970–4) were political heavyweights within the Cabinet, and as such were influential in the making of China policy. Although not a Cabinet priority, Prime Ministers Harold Wilson (1964–70) and Edward Heath (1970–4) each had a keen interest in the China issue – the former in relation to the Vietnam War, and the latter due to China's support for a strong Europe. In addition, China was not a matter for bureaucratic infighting and domestic politics. While the Colonial Office (the Commonwealth Office after 1966), the Ministry of Defence and the Board of Trade might put their bureaucratic interests first – Hong Kong's well-being, strategic considerations and the British economy respectively – any differences with the FO over China could normally be resolved through interdepartmental consultation. On China, Whitehall officials were seldom subjected to intense parliamentary and public pressures, given the tradition of bipartisanship in foreign policy and the salience of other issues such as Europe and the Middle East.<sup>42</sup> Although the 'hostage' crisis of 1967–9, as Chapter 4 shows, did result in sharp disagreement between the British diplomats (the FO) and the Hong Kong governor (the Commonwealth Office) on the one hand, and severe agitation among the British journalists and parliamentarians on the other, it was by no means an unmanageable political issue from the British government's perspective. This book draws heavily on the records of the FO/FCO and other departments in the British National Archives as well as a range of private papers, such as the Harold Wilson Papers in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and the China Association Papers in the School of Oriental and African Studies Library.

Although this book is primarily a study of British foreign policy and diplomacy, the Chinese side of the story is by no means ignored. Nor is it examined merely

from the perspective of British documentary records and Western secondary sources. Given the sudden closure of the once declassified diplomatic files covering the years from 1949 to 1965 in the Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives (the post-1965 materials have never been opened to researchers), this book does not purport to be a definitive account of the Chinese policymaking *process*. Nevertheless, by using a wide range of published Chinese archival and primary materials, including the two collections of documents sourced from the Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives<sup>43</sup> and the recently released chronicle (*nianpu*) of Mao Zedong,<sup>44</sup> I hope to paint as accurate and as complete a picture of China's aims, principles and policies as possible. During the Cold War, Mao was the ultimate decision maker on all foreign policy issues: Zhou Enlai was a trusted policy implementer. Seeing Britain as a declining imperialist power and thus a low priority in China's foreign policy, Mao and Zhou approached Sino-British relations within the wider context of the Cold War in Asia and particularly the Sino-American conflict. The Chinese Foreign Ministry and particularly its West European Department were charged with the day-to-day formulation of policy regarding Britain, while negotiating with the British diplomats stationed in Beijing. As such, this study considers not only the high politics of Anglo-Chinese diplomacy, but also how the British diplomats on the ground interacted with Chinese officialdom and experienced the 'everyday Cold War'.

The book is organized both chronologically and thematically, with six main chapters, an Introduction and a Conclusion. Each chapter seeks to illuminate the three sites of the 'everyday Cold War' – Asia, mainland China and Hong Kong – which are however not necessarily given equal emphasis. Chapter 1 focuses on the formative years of Anglo-Chinese relations following London's recognition of the PRC in early 1950. Instead of revisiting familiar ground in detail, the first section briefly outlines the Labour government's decision on recognition and then, by drawing on the published Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, takes a closer look at the abortive Anglo-Chinese negotiations over the establishment of diplomatic relations. The next two sections of the chapter examine how China eliminated the legacy of British imperialism on the mainland, while tolerating the continuation of British colonialism in Hong Kong. By the close of 1953, as this chapter concludes, Anglo-Chinese relations entered a 'post-imperial' era.

Chapter 2 begins with the 1954 Geneva Conference on Indochina, where the British and Chinese foreign secretaries used the occasion to improve bilateral relations. It reveals the interplay between the negotiations over Indochina and Anglo-Chinese rapprochement. After the exchange of *chargés d'affaires* in June 1954, Britain and China enjoyed merely 'semi-diplomatic relations', thanks to

the Taiwan question. As the second and third sections of the chapter illustrate, the Chinese needed to wage the 'everyday Cold War' against Britain at different levels. Nevertheless, China's 'everyday Cold War' encompassed both 'struggle' and 'unity' aspects, which were in line with the doctrine of 'united front'. The last section explores a number of issues where Anglo-Chinese cooperation was visible, such as the sale of British aircraft to China and the resolution of crises in the Taiwan Strait and the Sino-Indian borders.

The 'cooperative' aspect of China's 'united front' with Britain gave way to the 'struggle' dimension by 1965, however. The radicalization of the 'everyday Cold War' owed much to the escalation of the Vietnam War and the onset of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Chapter 3 focuses on 1965 and 1966, when China intensified its propaganda attacks on Britain and Hong Kong, and subjected the British diplomats on the ground to the ritual of diplomatic protests. Nevertheless, China's 'everyday' propaganda and protests were largely symbolic, intended to communicate other more important political messages to London. In Chapter 4, with the further radicalization of 'everyday Cold War' in 1967, the British diplomats and private nationals in China became the victims of Red Guard violence, culminating in the burning of the British Chargé Office. This chapter explores how the Wilson government assessed the 'performative' nature of the Red Guards' everyday violence, distinguishing it from China's largely non-interventionist foreign policy in the wider world.

Chapter 5 examines how, between 1968 and 1970, Britain and to a lesser extent China sought to 'normalize' their confrontation or restore their relations to the pre-1967 level. The first section details the negotiations over the release of the different categories of British 'hostages' – diplomats, Anthony Grey and other private Britons – on the mainland. The next section looks beyond the hostage crisis to examine the multifaceted relationship between Britain and China over such issues as trade, nuclear non-proliferation and the Sino-Soviet border war. During 1970, as the final section shows, the Chinese leaders were conducting the diplomacy of gestures to signal to Britain their desire for normal relations in an emerging multipolar world. By the time Britain and China entered into negotiations over an exchange of ambassadors in early 1971, the 'everyday Cold War' was all but over. Chapter 6 provides a comprehensive analysis of the year-long negotiations, culminating in the establishment of full diplomatic relations in March 1972. The British and the Chinese not only sincerely negotiated diplomatic normalization but also concluded a number of commercial deals on the exports of British aircraft to China. Even the outstanding issues relating to Hong Kong, such as the proposal for a Chinese official representative in

the territory, could not stand in the way of their new political and economic relations. The Conclusion takes an overview of the changing nature of Anglo-Chinese interactions from 1950 to 1972, and assesses whether the British efforts to contest and negotiate the 'everyday Cold War' represented the 'failure' of 'appeasement'.

In this book, I use the Pinyin system for the transliteration of Chinese names, except for Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi), with which Western readers are more familiar. In the endnotes, while the book and article titles of Chinese-language secondary works have been transliterated and translated into English, the specific details of Chinese primary sources (such as the news headlines of the *People's Daily*) are simply rendered in English due to space limitation.

## Negotiating a Post-Imperial Relationship, 1950–3

The First Opium War (1839–42) marked the beginning of China's degeneration into a 'semi-colony' in the face of British imperialism.<sup>1</sup> According to the Treaty of Nanjing, the British acquired Hong Kong as a Crown Colony and opened up four Chinese ports for foreign trade. After defeating the Qing state the second time and imposing more 'unequal treaties' on it in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Britain gradually constructed an 'informal empire' in China. Within the 'informal empire' made up of concessions, settlements and leased territories, British diplomats, settlers and businessmen enjoyed extraterritoriality, gunboat protection, control over China's maritime customs, and comfortable lives in the treaty ports. In particular, the British dominated the International Settlement of Shanghai, which became the centre of their trading, shipping, banking and manufacturing businesses.<sup>2</sup> While Britain (and other European powers) inflicted 'humiliation' on Qing China, Chinese immigrants caused Sinophobia within the United Kingdom. Fearful of competition from Chinese immigrants for jobs and even white women in Britain and the Empire, and influenced by the negative stereotypes of Chinatowns and 'Fu-Manchu' fictions, by the turn of the century more and more British (men) imagined the Chinese in racial terms as the 'Yellow Peril', or a source of moral degeneration.<sup>3</sup>

The collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911 had not seriously shaken Britain's 'informal empire' in China. With the rise of Chinese revolutionary nationalism in the mid-1920s, however, the British community in the treaty ports was under threat. To accommodate Chinese nationalism, the FO decided to relinquish lesser concessions like Hankou and Weihaiwei so that Britain's major interests, notably in Shanghai, could be safeguarded.<sup>4</sup> By the early 1930s, the Chinese government under Chiang Kai-shek had abolished almost two-thirds of the foreign concessions and reasserted China's control over customs, salt and

postal administrations.<sup>5</sup> Preoccupied with the rise of Nazi Germany in Europe, Britain was increasingly concerned about the Japanese encroachment in China, beginning with the 1931 Manchurian crisis and followed by a full-scale invasion in 1937. The onset of war in Europe and later in the Pacific quickened the formal end of the treaty-port system in China. In order to forge a 'special relationship' with the United States, Prime Minister Winston Churchill could not but regard Chiang Kai-shek as a key ally in the war against Japan, notwithstanding their differences over Burma, Hong Kong and other issues. On 11 January 1943, the United States and Britain concluded a treaty with Nationalist China, abolishing extraterritorial rights and other special privileges of the old treaties.<sup>6</sup> With America's defeat of Japan in August 1945 and the resumption of the Chinese Civil War the following year, the future of British-Chinese relations became uncertain.

This chapter examines how Britain sought to preserve its power and influence after the war, and how China under Mao Zedong strove to bury the 'century of humiliation'.

## Recognizing Communist China

After the Labour Party's landslide victory in the 1945 general election, Prime Minister Clement Attlee aspired to maintain Britain's power and influence in a rapidly changing world. Notwithstanding the post-war economic problems and the granting of independence to India and Burma, Britain remained militarily stronger than the defeated Germany and the devastated France, held a permanent seat in the UN Security Council, and retained formal and informal empires in Malaya (albeit with a communist insurgency since 1948), Africa and the Middle East. Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin hoped to create a 'third world force' in the bipolar international system. By organizing a 'Western European system' backed by 'the power and resources of the Commonwealth and of the Americans', Bevin argued in early 1948, Britain could exercise its influence and power alongside the two superpowers.<sup>7</sup> By late 1949, however, Bevin's 'third force' idea failed to materialize owing to the lack of enthusiasm on the part of Western Europeans and Americans and Britain's inability to mobilize Commonwealth and African resources.<sup>8</sup> Instead, the Attlee Cabinet accepted the recommendation of the Permanent Under-Secretary's Committee (a long-term planning unit in the FO) that British foreign policy should be based on the maintenance of a close Anglo-American alliance.<sup>9</sup>



True, the declining Britain had to depend on the United States for financial aid and for the defence of Western Europe against the Soviet Union in the emerging Cold War. Still, in the early post-war years, Britain did not shy away from acting as a world power: 'Awareness of relative economic decline took time to set in.'<sup>10</sup> Bevin, the 'Cold Warrior', and the more cautious Atlee played active roles in first alerting the Truman administration to the growing Soviet threat and then galvanizing Western European countries to support the US strategy of containment.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Winston Churchill, the wartime prime minister, had as early as March 1946 made his famous 'iron curtain' speech to warn against communism in Europe. Churchill was also the first to talk of the 'three interlocking circles' in British foreign policy. Accordingly, Britain served as a vital link between the 'three interlocking circles' – the Empire/Commonwealth, the United States and Europe. To sustain its power and influence in the world, Britain needed to maintain close links with all 'three circles'. Given the gap between Britain's global commitments and its limited resources, however, successive prime ministers tended to prioritize the 'three circles'. Churchill, for one, after returning to power in October 1951, argued that the first objective of British policy was 'the unity and consolidation of the British Commonwealth and what was left of the former British Empire', with cooperation with 'the English-speaking world' (particularly the United States) being the second objective and creation of a 'united Europe' the third. Yet the Anglo-American 'special relationship' was by no means valued lightly by the peacetime prime minister, who was eager to demonstrate solidarity with, and thereby exert a moderating influence on, his Atlantic ally.<sup>12</sup>

The Chinese Civil War,<sup>13</sup> which resumed in earnest in early 1946, presented the Atlee government with the challenge of managing Britain's relative decline and redefining its role in a rapidly changing Asia.<sup>14</sup> British policy towards the two warring Chinese parties was one of neutrality. In the course of 1949, British ministers and diplomats came to the conclusion that London should accord diplomatic recognition to the PRC, founded by Mao Zedong on 1 October. This policy of 'keeping a foot in the door' was based on legal, economic, colonial and geostrategic considerations.<sup>15</sup> It was in Britain's diplomatic tradition to recognize a government that had established effective control over a vast territory and population. The Chinese Communists had achieved a major breakthrough in the civil war by occupying Manchuria in the northeast in late 1948, and were on the brink of total victory after overrunning the major cities of Shanghai and Nanjing in the spring of 1949. With the fall of Guangzhou two weeks after the proclamation of the PRC, as Bevin put it in a memorandum to the Cabinet,

the Nationalist government was 'no longer representative of anything but their ruling clique', while the Chinese Communists were 'now the rulers of most of China'. Accordingly, legal advisers in the FO considered '*de jure* recognition' of the communist government to be 'legally justifiable'.<sup>16</sup> To Bevin, recognition was 'no more than an acceptance of a fact'; it implied the British 'willingness to enter into diplomatic relations with the new Government' and did 'not signify approval of its ideology or outlook'.<sup>17</sup>

'Keeping a foot in the door' was aimed to protect British commercial and shipping interests in China. According to a 1941 FO estimate, the total value of British commercial property and investments on the mainland stood at £300 million, one-third of which was situated in Shanghai. Besides trade *in* China, the British companies were heavily involved in trading *with* China in terms of exports from the Sterling Area, ocean shipping and 'invisible' trade.<sup>18</sup> After 1945, both the Board of Trade and the Treasury were under no illusion that the British 'informal empire' in China could be revived. Quite apart from the losses suffered during the Second World War, the economic disruption of the civil war and particularly the Nationalist blockade of the port of Shanghai since June 1949 made life extremely difficult for many a British businessman in China. Yet the FO, supported by the Board of Trade and the Treasury, argued that the British firms should endeavour to maintain themselves in China for as long as possible (although a decision as to whether to stay was primarily theirs). It was hoped that, with the end of the fighting, the new Chinese government would need foreign trade and capital for rebuilding its economy, and China would become a potentially huge market for Britons in the long term.<sup>19</sup>

Britain needed to safeguard the Crown Colony of Hong Kong, which had survived more than three years of Japanese occupation as well as the pressures from US president Franklin Roosevelt and Chiang Kai-shek for its return to China after the war. A free port and a stable city, Hong Kong was valuable for British trading, banking and shipping companies operating in the Far East. As part of the Sterling Area, Hong Kong held its currency balances in London and thus contributed to the financial strength of the United Kingdom. By early 1949, Hong Kong's future became uncertain in view of the impending communist victory in the Chinese Civil War. Although, according to British intelligence, a direct attack on Hong Kong was deemed unlikely, the risk of internal unrest caused by the influx of refugees and communist-inspired riots could not be dismissed. In April-May, Atlee's Cabinet decided to reinforce Hong Kong twice, increasing the British garrison from one infantry brigade to a division plus a brigade. With deteriorating US-Soviet relations in Europe, Bevin defined Hong

Kong's significance in Cold War terms, as 'Berlin of the East', in an attempt to rally US support for the colony's defence.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, British ministers realized that the best defence was a diplomacy of engagement with Communist China. As the Cabinet concluded on 26 May, 'The aim of our policy should be to find a basis on which a Communist Government of China could acquiesce in our remaining in Hong Kong.'<sup>21</sup> When consulting with the US secretary of state, Dean Acheson, about China policy in early September, Bevin argued that Britain was 'not in a hurry' to recognize Communist China, but it had 'big commercial interests' in China and 'had to keep an eye on Hong Kong.'<sup>22</sup>

From a geostrategic perspective, a conciliatory approach towards China was in line with the British assessments of Sino-Soviet relations and, more generally, of the Cold War in Asia. In early 1949, British diplomats and intelligence officers concluded that the Chinese Communists were 'orthodox Marxist-Leninists' (as revealed in the communist documents captured during a police raid in Hong Kong). On 30 June Mao proclaimed in a speech, 'On the People's Democratic Dictatorship', that China should 'lean to one side' – the side of the Soviet Union – in the bipolar Cold War. Despite Mao's pro-Moscow speech (which aimed to impress upon a suspicious Stalin following the split between Tito's Yugoslavia and the Soviets),<sup>23</sup> the FO opined that over time nationalism would emerge stronger than communism in China. It was estimated that the Chinese Communists, having suffered from decades of foreign imperialism, would not want to see their country become a satellite of Soviet Russia. By developing diplomatic and economic contact with Communist China, Britain hoped to drive a wedge into the Sino-Soviet alliance. 'The only hope of encouraging the emergence in China of a less anti-Western tendency', the FO argued, was 'to give the new regime time to realise both the necessity of Western help in overcoming its economic difficulties, and the natural incompatibility of Soviet imperialism with Chinese national interests.'<sup>24</sup>

Recognition was not simply a bilateral issue between Britain and China, but one that had wider repercussions for Anglo-American relations and the Commonwealth. To Atlee and Bevin, no decision should be made until after extensive consultations with the United States, the Commonwealth and other friendly powers. From the outset, the British and Americans had divergent views on China. If the FO hoped to split the Sino-Soviet partnership through economic contact with the Chinese Communists, the Department of State was contemplating the use of trade controls to influence their political orientation. Through a 'hard' wedge strategy by pressure, the United States hoped to first increase the Chinese dependency on the Soviets and then turn Mao into a

'Chinese Tito', when he realized that Stalin was an unreliable ally and China's national interest was bound to clash with Moscow's.<sup>25</sup> While Bevin regarded de facto control over a vast territory as a legal justification for early recognition, Acheson insisted that the new Chinese government should also discharge its international obligations as a prerequisite to recognition.<sup>26</sup>

In August, the Department of State published the China White Paper, a huge volume of documents with analyses on pre-1949 US-China relations. In his open letter of transmittal, Acheson defended the administration's opposition to full-scale intervention in the civil war, attributing the Nationalist defeat to their misuse of US aid and their own inefficiency.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, because of the Department of Defence's concern about the security implications of China's loss for Japan and the pressure from Congress and the China lobby, Truman and Acheson could not abandon Chiang outright, but continued to provide limited military and economic assistance to the Nationalist regime so as to delay the inevitable for as long as possible. The administration would wait for the collapse of Nationalist Taiwan, and the emergence in China of a government independent of Moscow, before making the final decision on recognition. Herein lay Acheson's approach to 'waiting for the dust to settle',<sup>28</sup> which diverged from the British policy of 'keeping a foot' in China.

After close consultations in late 1949, the Truman administration 'agreed to disagree' with the Attlee government over recognition. Aware that the British had more extensive interests in China than did the Americans, Acheson told Bevin in a meeting on 13 September that 'we should make a clear distinction between policy and situation.' 'The British may hold on longer because of their situation and we less longer because of ours, but division of policy is in error,' lest the communists would be able to 'drive a wedge' between Britain and America. Acheson agreed with Bevin that 'the difference was in tactics and not in objectives'<sup>29</sup> – how to encourage Chinese Titoism and thereby crack the communist monolith. After all, both America and Britain regarded the Soviet Union as the main threat, and Europe as the priority in the Cold War. They were willing to accommodate their differences over China as long as they could maintain close cooperation over Europe.<sup>30</sup>

The British, moreover, received support from the Commonwealth, with India being enthusiastic about recognizing Communist China from the outset and Canada, Australia and New Zealand having initial reservations about breaking ranks with America, and from Western European countries, with the exception of France due to the political implications for Vietnam (where Ho Chi Minh's forces had been fighting for independence since 1946).<sup>31</sup> On 15 December, the

Cabinet approved Bevin's recommendation for according *de jure* recognition to the PRC, which came on 6 January 1950. How did China respond to Britain's recognition?

## Negotiating diplomatic relations

Even before achieving complete military victory, Mao Zedong had been pondering on the future diplomacy of the 'New China'. During the spring and summer of 1949, he developed the principles of 'making a fresh start', 'cleaning the house before inviting the guests', and 'leaning to one side'. After a 'century of humiliation', Mao, who was born in 1893 and had experienced foreign imperialism first-hand, was determined to make a complete break with the past. As 'Old China was a semi-colonial country under imperialist domination', Mao said in March, the new communist government was obliged to refuse recognition of 'the treasonable treaties' of the Guomindang regime and to 'systematically and completely destroy imperialist domination' in China.<sup>32</sup> With the founding of the PRC on 1 October, Mao held that the Chinese revolution did not end at that point, but should continue until the new government had made a clean sweep of all remaining imperialist influences on the mainland, and until China had restored its central position in the international system – thus his theory of 'continuous revolution'.<sup>33</sup>

Concerning the question of establishing diplomatic relations with the outside world, Mao and Zhou Enlai saw the necessity of 'differential treatment'. As for socialist countries, the procedure was straightforward: no negotiation but only an exchange of notes was required. Thus, within three months after the PRC's founding, diplomatic relations were established with eleven socialist states.<sup>34</sup> As far as Western capitalist/imperialist countries like the United States and Britain were concerned, Mao argued that 'we should not be in a hurry'. China was 'willing to establish diplomatic relations with all countries on the principle of equality'; but as long as 'the imperialist countries do not change their hostile attitude' towards the Chinese people, 'we shall not grant them legal status in China'.<sup>35</sup> For one thing, Beijing needed to 'clean the house before inviting the guests' (see the next section). Besides, Mao attached great importance to the imperialist countries' relations with the Nationalist regime, which by late 1949 had retreated to the island of Taiwan. In this regard, he insisted on the principle of 'negotiation before establishing diplomatic relations' with the aim of clarifying their attitudes towards Taiwan. In his instruction to Liu Shaoqi (the CCP's second