

How FDR Was Manipulated and Betrayed by His Own Naval Intelligence Chief in the Fateful Last Months of WWII

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Unknown for decades, declassified documents show that FDR’s mail was deliberately diverted and falsified to prevent a historic meeting with Mao Zedong that might have shortened the war, changed history, and reshaped the modern world.

Historians cite the 1972 meeting between Mao Zedong and Richard Nixon as the original spark for U.S.-China Globalization in which the U.S. and China began cooperating to industrialize China and integrate the two countries’ economies.

But a much younger Mao Zedong had tried to interest President Franklin Delano Roosevelt on Globalization 27 years earlier, and history would have turned out differently if Roosevelt had agreed.

The [Korean](#) and [Vietnam Wars](#)—which resulted in millions of deaths—could have been avoided along with the Taiwan Straits crisis of 1958, which [nearly resulted in a nuclear apocalypse](#), and Taiwan would not have been separated from Mother China.

On January 9, 1945, Mao Zedong reached out from his headquarter in Yan’an to President Roosevelt. U.S. Army Major Ray Cromley—acting chief of the U.S. mission in Yan’an—forwarded this message to U.S. Army headquarters in Chungking:

Mao and Zhou will be immediately available either singly or together for exploratory conference at Washington should President Roosevelt express desire to receive them at White House as leaders of a primary Chinese party.

At this time Mao Zedong was a vibrant 51-year-old at the height of his powers. Washington officials at this moment knew little about the twentieth century’s largest revolution as it developed from embryo to maturity. Mao had transformed Yan’an, which six years earlier most Chinese had never heard of, into a base which American tanks and airplanes could not threaten and also made it into one of China’s largest educational centers.

Mao founded the University of Resistance, which graduated more than 10,000 students a year. He built primary schools, middle schools, three colleges, the largest arts academy in China, and a vocational training school. A publishing house—hidden deep in the loess hills—printed books, magazines, and newspapers. A factory produced many types of medicines. Mao created the Women’s University, housed in a series of caves connected by internal walkways.



Zhou Enlai (left) and Mao Zedong (center) in Yan’an in the mid-1930s. [Source: alphahistory.com]

In contrast, Franklin Roosevelt was a sickly 62-year-old just weeks from death, struggling to comprehend events in his administration. Two months after Mao had reached out to him, a grey and worn FDR appeared before a joint session of Congress on March 1 to report the Yalta agreement. Observers were taken aback to see the diminished president seated in his wheelchair, the first time he had done so when addressing Congress.

Roosevelt explained, “I have just completed a fourteen-thousand-mile trip.” When FDR met with Vice President Harry Truman, Roosevelt’s hands shook so much that he could not drink a cup of coffee without spilling it.

General Albert Wedemeyer recorded his thoughts after a meeting in the White House:

“I had not seen the President for several months and was shocked at his physical appearance. His color was ashen, his face drawn, and his jaw drooping. I had difficulty in conveying information to him because he seemed in a daze. Several times I repeated the same idea because his mind did not seem to retain or register.”



Chiang Kai-shek, Mayling Soong, and General Joseph Stilwell. Off the record, General Stilwell said about Chiang: “The trouble in China is simple: We are allied to an ignorant, illiterate, superstitious, peasant son of a bitch.” [Source: commons.wikimedia.org]

Many American observers—like General Joseph Stilwell and the State Department China Hands—sensed the political reality in China and understood that Mao was much more than a “leader of a primary Chinese party.”

The truth was that Mao was about to claim the Mandate of Heaven and become China’s next Emperor. This was not only because of his revolutionary policies but also because the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had played a central role in the defeat of the Japanese invaders, while Chiang had used U.S. aid to fight the communists.

But back in Washington, Roosevelt—like most Americans—was oblivious to the CCP’s political strength and believed in the China mirage.

America’s China mirage began in the early 1800s. American merchants and missionaries believed that poor China was collapsing like an old barn. And what better way for China to heal than to emulate up-and-coming America and embrace Capitalism and Christianity.

Nineteenth Century Twentieth Century

In the 1840s, President Roosevelt’s grandfather, Warren Delano, Jr., made a fortune as the American Opium King of China.

In a Washington press conference with Madame Chiang Kai-shek at his side, President Roosevelt told this whopper to the American people:

The people of China well over a century have been, in thought and in objective, closer to us Americans than almost any other peoples in the world—the same great ideals.

China, in the last—less than half a century has become one of the great democracies of the world.

FDR was mouthing gibberish, but maybe the cause was “hopium.” The Soong family had bankrolled Chiang Kai-shek and had convinced FDR that Chiang yearned to be a democrat in Roosevelt’s image and that the Chinese people wished to be just like Americans.

American officials from the U.S. Army and the State Department stationed in China—many of them fluent in Chinese like General Stilwell—saw Mao’s rise as inevitable, but Franklin Delano Roosevelt followed Grandpa Warren Delano’s belief that America was destined to Christianize and democratize China.

The president’s mother, Sara Delano Roosevelt, was fond of saying that Franklin was “a Delano, not a Roosevelt at all.” When Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau gave a recommendation regarding U.S.-China relations, FDR sniffed, “Please remember that I have a background of a little over a century in Chinese affairs.”

The Soong family’s China Lobby understood America’s China mirage, they had all been schooled in East Coast universities, including FDR’s Harvard. They cooed to FDR about the inevitable Americanization of China and presented their front man—Chiang Kai-shek—as FDR’s vehicle to inject trickle-down Christianity and Capitalism into China.

Roosevelt was convinced that he would make China America’s best friend in Asia. Others outside the glare of America’s China mirage were more realistic. Prime Minister Winston Churchill referred to FDR’s China dream as “the Great American illusion.”

In England, the British enjoyed a radio comedy program that featured a Chiang Kai-shek character named General Cash My Cheque. Yet FDR expended more taxpayer funds on his Chiang-China mirage than he did on the Atom Bomb.

The late David Halberstam described America’s China mirage of the 1930s and 1940s:

The China that existed in the minds of millions of Americans was the most illusory of countries, filled as it was with dutiful, obedient peasants who liked America and loved Americans, who longed for nothing so much as to be like them. It was a country where ordinary peasants allegedly hoped to be more Christian and were eager, despite the considerable obstacles in their way, to rise out of what Americans considered a heathen past. Millions of Americans believed not only that they loved (and understood) China and the Chinese, but also that it was their duty to Americanize the Chinese. “With God’s help, we will lift Shanghai up and up, ever up until it is just like Kansas City,” said Senator Kenneth Wherry of Nebraska. . . .

There were two Chinas. There was the China in the American public mind, a China as Americans wanted it to be, and the other China, the real China.... The illusory China was a heroic ally, ruled by the brave, industrious, Christian, pro-American Chiang Kai-shek ...

By 1945, Mao oversaw an empire of one hundred million, about twice the population of Britain, but FDR incorrectly judged that Chiang would be the Chinese people’s choice and Mao a disaffected party.

Mao Zedong had reached out to the American president through FDR’s representatives at Mao’s base, the U.S. Army. Unknown for decades was that confidential U.S. Navy operators

commanded by Captain Milton “Mary” Miles of U.S. Navy Intelligence diverted the U.S. Army-generated cable and handed it over to the head of Chiang’s secret police, Mr. Dai Li. Captain Miles and Dai Li rewrote the memo to make it appear that Mao was attempting to discredit U.S. Ambassador Patrick Hurley in FDR’s eyes.



Mao Zedong, Ambassador Patrick Hurley, and Chiang Kai-shek. Hurley called Mao “Moose Dung.” Mao called Hurley “The Clown.” [Source: wiki.china.org]

Neither Mao Zedong, Ambassador Hurley nor FDR ever realized that their relations had been manipulated by U.S. Naval Intelligence and Chiang’s Gestapo. FDR was soon dead, and millions would die in preventable conflicts—the Chinese Civil War, the Korean War and the Vietnam War—before the U.S. would embrace Mao’s vision.

We know the vision Mao would have presented to FDR because Mao had sketched his dream to a brilliant U.S. State Department representative just months earlier who spent hours with China’s presumptive leader and took copious notes.



Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, John Service, Mao Zedong, unknown. Later the U.S. State Department would fire all Americans who had spoken to Mao Zedong. [Source: twitter.com]

In August 1944, Mao Zedong and John Service met in Mao's Yan'an cave home. For eight intense hours—with a break for dinner cooked by Mao's wife, Jiang Qing—John Service had more substantive conversations with Mao than any other American government official would have for the next quarter century.

John Service was an excellent choice to be America's interlocutor with Mao Zedong. Born in China, the 35-year-old Service was fluent in a handful of Chinese dialects. Service had dealt often with Chiang and Mao. He had also traveled the country by public transport to plumb the attitudes of the ordinary Chinese.

Service and General Stilwell—along with many other Americans in China—understood that continued support of Chiang would put the U.S. on the wrong side of history, that whatever the U.S. did in China, Mao was destined to claim the Mandate of Heaven.

In his cave home Mao told Service what was obvious to many American officials in China:

"Chiang Kai-shek was elected President by only ninety members of a single party ... even Hitler has a better claim to democratic power ... fundamentally he is a gangster.... Chiang holds the bayonets and the secret police ... The fact is clear ... that China's political tendency is towards us...."

Mao told Service why he preferred Wall Street over Russian borscht:

The Russians have suffered greatly in the war and will have their hands full with their own job of rebuilding. We do not expect Russian help.

Mao then sketched a win-win relationship between the U.S. and China:

China must industrialize. This can be done—in China—only by free enterprise and with the aid of foreign capital.... Chinese and American interests are correlated and similar. They fit together, economically and politically. We can and must work together ... we will be interested in the most rapid possible development of the country on constructive and productive lines.

America does not need to fear that we will not be cooperative. We must cooperate and we must have American help ... we cannot risk crossing you—cannot risk any conflict with you.

Two months after his cable to FDR had been spiked, Mao Zedong met with John Service once more, again pleading for U.S.-China friendship:

Between the people of China and the people of the United States there are strong ties of sympathy, understanding and mutual interest.... China's greatest postwar need is economic development. She lacks the capitalistic foundation necessary to carry this out alone.... America and China complement each other economically; they will not compete ... America is not only the most suitable country to assist this economic development of China, she is also the only country fully able to participate. For all these reasons there must not and cannot be any conflict, estrangement or misunderstanding between the Chinese people and America ...

Mao Zedong extended the hand of friendship to Roosevelt through the highest-ranking U.S. Army and State Department officials to whom he had access. The vision he described was what we now call Globalization: the U.S. and China cooperating to industrialize China, with Russia a far distant partner.

Historians can argue that Mao was insincere, that he was sweet-talking Moscow at this same time. But Mao was much more a realist in search of power than a political ideologue. Support from the richest country on earth, the most industrialized World War II power with the world's deepest pools of capital—doesn't it make sense that a practical and ambitious Mao would have deserted Joe Stalin for FDR any day?

Imagine if Mao Zedong had been able to break through FDR's China mirage and convince him that American Army and State officials were trying to show him the reality in China? Roosevelt cooperated with Soviet Communists, why not Chinese? Imagine no Chinese Civil War, no Korean War, no Vietnam War, no vexing Taiwan problem still dogging the world today?

One Washington official warned John Service that writing the truth about China was dangerous: "Jesus, Service! I read that thing of yours, and I certainly agree with you, but it is going to get you in a lot of trouble."

In 1949 Mao Zedong shattered America's China mirage when he claimed the Mandate of Heaven.

Rather than admit they had been self-deluded by the idea that the Chinese wanted to be just like them, Americans asked in shock, “Who lost China?”

On February 9, 1950, Senator Joe McCarthy nailed John Service’s hide to the wall:

Today we are engaged in a final, all-out battle between communistic atheism and Christianity.... As one of our outstanding historical figures once said, ‘When a great democracy is destroyed, it will not be because of enemies from without, but rather because of enemies from within ... This is glaringly true in the State Department ... When Chiang Kai-shek was fighting our war, the State Department had in China a young man named John S. Service ... [H]e sent official reports back to the State Department urging that we torpedo our ally Chiang Kai-shek—and stating, in effect, that communism was the best hope of China.

I have here in my hand 57 cases of individuals who would appear to be either card-carrying members or certainly loyal to the Communist Party, but who nevertheless are still helping to shape our foreign policy.

John Service and others had accurately reported reality from WWII China, but they then ran head-on into the China mirage, an American belief system about China as old as the Republic. Soon the State Department fired all employees who spoke Chinese. Many years later, former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara—the chief whiz-kid architect of the Vietnam War—observed:

Our government lacked experts for us to consult to compensate for our ignorance. When the Berlin crisis occurred in 1961 and during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, President Kennedy was able to turn to senior people ... who knew the Soviets intimately. There were no senior officials in the Pentagon or State Department with comparable knowledge of Southeast Asia.... The irony of this gap was that it existed largely because the top East Asian and China experts in the State Department (such as John Service)—had been purged during the McCarthy hysteria of the 1950s.

Popular history credits the birth of U.S.-China cooperation and Globalization to President Richard Nixon. Lost in the mist of time was that the winning combination of American capital and technology and Chinese labor was an idea that Mao Zedong first suggested in 1944. A generation would pass before Nixon—motivated by the American quagmire in Vietnam and competition with Russia — came to a similar conclusion.

In 1971 Nixon announced his upcoming journey to the Middle Kingdom. Chinese leaders graciously remembered their American friends from the cave meetings in Yan’an. Premier Zhou Enlai welcomed John Service back to China.

After he returned from China, John Service testified to the Senate:

My recent visit to China convinces me that the root of the current Chinese reality may be found in what we reported from Yan’an in 1944.... I think that our involvement in Vietnam, our insistence on the need to contain China and to prevent what we thought was the spread of Communist influence in Southeast Asia, was based very largely on our misunderstanding and our lack of knowledge of the Chinese, the nature of the Chinese Communist movement, and the intention of their leaders. We assumed that they were an aggressive country, and I don’t believe that they really have been, and,

therefore, I think that we got into Vietnam largely, as I say, through the misinterpretation and misfounded fear of China.

If the United States in 1945 had been able to ... shed some of its illusions about China, to understand what was happening in that country, and to adopt a realistic policy in America's own interests, Korea and Vietnam would probably never have happened ... We would not still be confronted with an unsolvable Taiwan problem ...

No Korean and Vietnam Wars. No conflict now over Taiwan. As I write this, I am 67 years old. Raised in America during the 1950s and 1960s, I was taught that Mao Zedong had an irrational hatred for America.

It was only many years later that I learned that Mao Zedong had actually pitched U.S.-China cooperation and that it was America that harbored an irrational hatred. None of my teachers ever told me that Mao Zedong had once pleaded with the State Department's John Service:

There must not and cannot be any conflict, estrangement or misunderstanding between the Chinese people and America.

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James Bradley hosts the podcast [Untold Pacific](#), featuring stories from his decades of experience in Asia. James is the author of the New York Times #1 best-selling book, *Flags of Our Fathers* (2000) that was made into a movie by Stephen Spielberg and Clint Eastwood. Bradley wrote three other critically acclaimed books about the United States in Asia: *Flyboys*, *The Imperial Cruise* and *The China Mirage*.

Featured image: Mao Zedong in a U.S. army jeep with U.S. Ambassador to China, Patrick J. Hurley, behind him in hat. [Source: [thinkchina.sg](#)]

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