# 2 Sensory Contact
## Life in the Orient

When marine Private E. B. Sledge looked out of his train window in September 1945, he saw a "desolate landscape" in North China: "Everything was windswept, dusty, and brown. Different shades of brown, but brown nevertheless." Upon disembarking, he encountered "the imposing ancient multistory tower of the Chien Men Gate" in Beijing, which "stood like a massive fortress atop the huge centuries-old wall around the city." Soon he arrived at his billet, located in the historical legation quarters, where "one could see evidence of repairs on the walls from damage during the Boxer Rebellion in 1899."[1] The so-called Peking siege was broken by foreign troops, including American, making it one of the earliest marine missions in China. For Second Lieutenant John B. Simms, the initial Chinese scene was farmlands with dirt roads, "drab and totally lacking color," and its uniformed people where "one group faded into the next without distinction" because of the "sameness of their clothing, dark blue or black for the most part with a brighter blue or white being almost the only contrast." Shortly afterward, "wandering through the old city" of Tianjin "introduced the American to sights, sounds, and smells that clouded the senses and left him gasping."[2]

This chapter explores the US servicemen's everyday lives in postwar China through their visceral, sensorial experience. The China mission assigned American soldiers a wide variety of capacities, roles, and spaces in their interaction with the Chinese people. Sometimes, this placed GIs in dangerous environments vulnerable to violent attacks. Other times, it enabled American influence to penetrate to places and groups that had been too far to reach, allowing the forging of direct relations with lasting impacts on both sides. While largely maintaining a privileged lifestyle, GIs also engaged in intimate connections with local populations by exchanging goods, services, languages, and cultures. They went on sightseeing trips in the Forbidden City, smelt the "honeydipper" carts on the street, ate water buffalo meat, danced with Chinese women, and learned Pidgin Chinese. Acting as soldiers as well as tourists, consumers, cultural messengers, and everyday diplomats on the ground, they experienced China in ways that both followed and contradicted official policies and popular representations.



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Historically, American soldiers' sensory encounters with China were characterized by both fascination and contempt, enchantment and alienation. Their senses were sometimes assaulted by the dust, dirt, noise, and stench of "the Orient," and other times satisfied by its many comforting tastes and gentle touches. Existing Orientalist framing presented GIs with a variety of linguistic, aesthetic, and moral options when conceptualizing Chinese society, ranging from premodern tranquility and a peaceful society to Oriental cruelty, deception, and corruption. The realpolitik of wartime propaganda, assisted by American popular media, spread new positive images of the Chinese allies, from the country's beautiful scenery to its well-educated and democratic people. The GIs' portraits of China consequently often shifted between two opposite poles: Chinese cities and countryside both peaceful and foul; food delicious and poisonous; women elegant and dangerous; people hardworking and dishonest, hospitable and cruel. Racist contempt continued to fill the pages of GI memoirs. However, their sensory experiences and accounts sometimes went against their American "rationality" and military instructions. For example, many indulged in Chinese cuisine and bargained with local hawkers, inventing new Americanisms, foods, and identities that were transferred back to their hometowns. The mental and visceral domains became intricately linked through the exchanges of objects and experiences in quotidian encounters.

Conceptually, the senses provide an analytical lens through which to examine the entangled everyday politics of American military involvement in postwar China. United States servicemen's sensory stereotypes, sensory metaphors, and the construction of the sensory self and otherness reveal the deployment of power in the nexus of diplomatic relations and daily interactions.[3] While their visceral experiences and sensorial narratives were conditioned by preexisting Orientalist beliefs and racist prejudices, as well as the unequal relations between the two nations, GIs' cultural identities were reshaped by intimate interactions involving new sights, smells, tastes, sounds, and touches. Together with their letters, memoirs, photos, souvenirs, reports, and tales sent home, these intimate encounters with Chinese society also helped shape postwar American identities and locals' perceptions of America in profound ways.

## Life as an Occupier

> The Marines were the occupying force in this area which made the later entry of Chinese Nationalist forces and officials possible. They – and not the Chinese – disarmed the Japanese.
>
> American Consul in Tianjin, August 27, 1946[4]

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American servicemen in China, predominantly white males, belonged to various branches, including the marine leathernecks, the navy bluejackets, and the army doughboys.[5] These groups differed in their historical ties with China, their experiences during WWII, and the perspectives of their senior leadership on the civil war. As their wartime rivalry continued into the postwar era, members of each group took pride in their distinctive identities and often claimed cultural superiority over the others.[6] These service members also varied in experience and background, ranging from "Old China Hands," being officers who had prewar assignments in the country, and WWII veterans from the Pacific battlefield to new recruits fresh out of boot camps. The US military in China had deep roots dating back to the nineteenth century. Between August 1900 and May 1901, approximately twenty-five hundred army soldiers and marines were part of the Eight-Nation Alliance that helped put down the Boxer Uprising and occupied Beijing.[7] A permanent guard was established at the US legation in Beijing, initially consisting of the army's 9th Infantry and later replaced by the marine legation guard, which remained in place until December 8, 1941. To protect American citizens and properties, a near-battalion-sized marine guard and two battalions of the 15th US Infantry were stationed in the nearby city of Tianjin. Additionally, US Navy gunboats patrolled the Yangzi River till the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.[8] These historical connections provided US servicemen with a sense of affinity toward China, as their official guides often pointed out, and many of them had actual connections to the country. For instance, Major General Peck, then a colonel, had commanded the 4th Marines in Shanghai in the 1940s, while Major General Rockey and Brigadier General Worton, the IIIAC's commanding officer and chief of staff, respectively, had both served in China before WWII. After spending more than three years in a Japanese prison following his evacuation from Shanghai to the Philippines, Samuel L. Howard also returned to China as a newly promoted major general, replacing General Rockey and assuming command of the 1st Marine Division in September 1946. In total, between three hundred and four hundred US Marine Corps personnel in the subordinate divisions had previously served in China.[9]

Once considered the crème de la crème of US Marine Corps duty, the postwar deployments to China delighted most old China hands.[10] General Worton, who had spent about twelve years serving in the country and mastering the Chinese language during the 1920s and the 1930s, described China to his assistants as a dreamland for assignments.[11] Upon their triumphal return, high-ranking officers stayed in fancy Western-style hotels and beautifully furnished houses seized from citizens of

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Figure 2.1 A European-style mansion in Qingdao, serving as the residence of the US Marine Corps commanding general. MCHD.

enemy European nations, many of whom had been longtime residents of China. These homes were equipped with modern amenities, including flushing toilets, bathtubs, heaters, fireplaces, and stovetop kitchens, and a large number of household staff, cooks, and servants – a level of luxury unattainable back home (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2). The Astor Hotel in Tianjin, the first international hotel in modern Chinese history, built in 1863, exuded a Victorian-era atmosphere and had hosted a long list of celebrity guests, including several future US presidents. The Cathay Hotel, located on Shanghai's Bund and owned by Victor Sassoon, boasted a level of luxury that General Wedemeyer called "too doggy for a Nebraska farmboy," and he soon moved out of the British tycoon's flat in the hotel.[12] In Beijing, Brigadier General Gerald C. Thomas, soon to take command of the Fleet Marine Force, Western Pacific, was warmly greeted by the "ancient doorman" at the legendary Wagons-Lits Hotel with "Welcome back, Captain Thomas," a heartfelt acknowledgment of his departure in 1937 from the marine detachment at the American embassy.[13] Local governments formed reception committees for

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Figure 2.2 A team of Chinese staff, including cooks, servants, drivers, and butlers, providing services at the Marine Corps commanding general's quarters in Qingdao. MCHD.

members of the Allied forces, frequently honoring US officers with lavish banquets and gifts, such as silk, embroidered tablecloths, lacquer vases, ivory figures, and antique screens, as tokens of gratitude and hospitality. Samuel B. Griffith, a former US Marine Corps provost marshal and inspector, recalled that everyone was having "a pretty good time" because the "pressure was off."[14] Similarly, Omar T. Pfeiffer, the former marine commander in Qingdao, noted that Admiral Charles M. Cooke Jr., the commander of the Seventh Fleet and Naval Forces, Western Pacific, replaced senior officers in China because "they were still too much imbued with wartime combat spirit, which is 'eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.'"[15] Even in these official oral history interviews, officers – speaking with discretion – admitted that "the division was running like a ship without a rudder."[16]

Most leathernecks from the Pacific were initially thrilled to see civilization again and enjoyed a comfortable life after years of fighting in harsh

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jungles and brutal battlefields. Given the low cost of living in China and their pay, the lowest of which exceeded fifty dollars a month, all ranks hired houseboys to cook, clean, and run errands.[17] But morale among veterans was low because of the dullness of a daily routine without a well-defined mission and frustration over the lack of a specific date for going home. Many did not feel safe in China, with occasional threats from Communist troops and other local forces. By mid April 1946, nearly all marine veterans originally deployed to China had been sent home or were scheduled to go, having earned enough demobilization points amidst enormous public pressure to release combat veterans. As they were leaving and new recruits were coming, China became "a proverbial swinging door."[18] The personnel situation of the marines was far from ideal, as many rookies lacked basic training and competence but were eager for adventures and glories, without the opportunity to experience actual battles or claim military honors. One fresh enlistee who came to China as a replacement admitted that he felt cheated, as "there was no prospect of action. There were only bars that charged exorbitant prices and coolies who looked to him like a definitely inferior people and girls who fawned and pouted and performed for cash."[19] Short-term sailors were notorious for leisure-seeking activities after extended periods at sea. In late 1945, the Seventh Fleet put ashore between three thousand and seven thousand sailors a night in Shanghai, who had been at sea for years without liberty. They "had pent-up desires to have a lot of fun" and had lots of back pay to afford whatever pleasures they wanted. "It was a hellacious experience."[20]

Shaped by their backgrounds, the experiences of US servicemen in China could also evolve over time. As the initial excitement waned and "their first hangovers have worn off," some were hit by homesickness and China's rampant inflation. The exchange rate plummeted from twenty-seven hundred Chinese yuan per one US dollar when the advance party arrived in Qingdao, to two thousand yuan as the main body of troops landed, and further dropped to twelve hundred yuan within a week.[21] The Oriental paradise of the servicemen's first impression "turned out to be just a glamorous gyp joint."[22] But a lot also depended on where they were stationed. Qingdao, located only two hundred miles south of Soviet-controlled Port Arthur, was the principal Japanese embarkation point and became a major fleet anchorage for the American military in the Far East. Since the end of the nineteenth century, it had been occupied by Germany, followed by Japan, and remained a modern port city known as the Riviera of the Far East. The ice-free port of Qinhuangdao to the north was close to the Manchurian border, where foreign deep draft ships once loaded coal from mines using modern piers built by Herbert Hoover

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in the early twentieth century. Tianjin, where the IIIAC headquarters were located, impressed most servicemen with mansions inside its former foreign concession, world-class entertainments, and an active social life involving a large European expat community. Beijing, known as China's historical capital, carried the special charms of the ancient culture, while Shanghai attracted a substantial number of troops from inside and outside China as a major liberty spot and a favorite destination for rest and recuperation (R&R) programs and family shopping. Despite the varied features of these cities, the real difference lay between cities and rural areas, where "life was rugged for the Marines on the trains and for the bridge detachments living in substandard housing and standing dangerous and isolated watches."[23] Often these detachments had a billet area consisting of a Chinese compound or a series of huts enclosed within a wire-and-bunker perimeter (see Figure 2.3). But these guards' positions were on rotation, and liberty time was generously granted. Almost all US soldiers maintained a privileged lifestyle while living in postwar China, or at least had a taste of it.

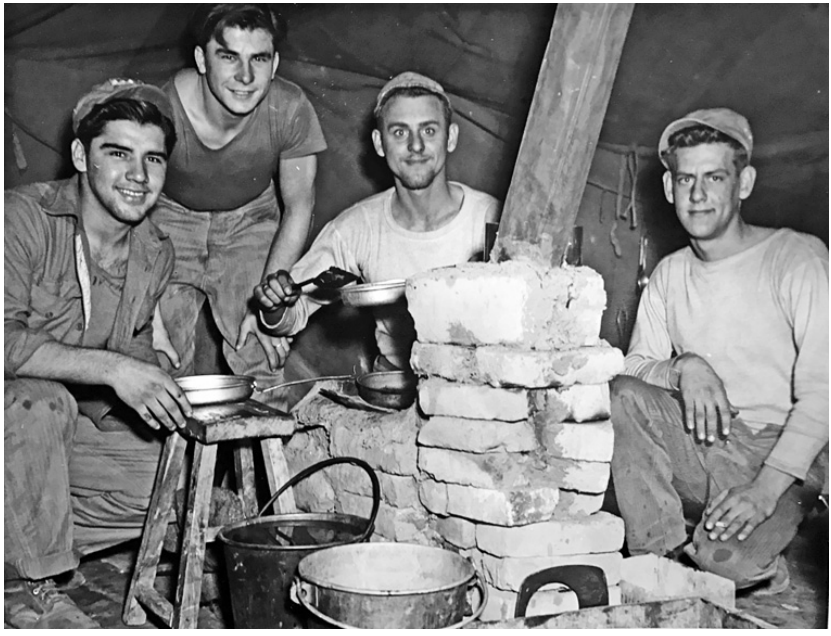


Figure 2.3 Marines posing for a photo while preparing a meal in North China. MCHD.

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To maintain soldiers' physical health and morale, the US military had been shipping massive quantities of goods worldwide since Pearl Harbor, establishing a global network of supplies, entertainment, and services. After the war, the military in China moved quickly to establish a variety of recreational and sports facilities for liberty time and training purposes. XABU, the first radio station in China sponsored by the US Marine Corps, was completed on November 10, 1945, to mark the US Marine Corps' 170th birthday.[24] In October 1945, just days after the marines' arrival, two Red Cross clubs opened in Tianjin: the Concordia or the former German Club, located on Woodrow Wilson Road, and the former French Club on Rue de France. These clubs featured canteens staffed by civilian hostesses who arranged dances, snack luncheons, and a variety of entertainment, along with sports facilities such as bowling, billiards, and Ping-Pong.[25] In Qingdao, the Red Cross Club was launched on November 3, taking over the former Qingdao International Club, originally built in 1913 for German colonials. Staffed with American hostesses, the facility was formally dedicated by General Shepherd, in whose honor the building was renamed the Shepherd House. On Christmas Eve, the Enlisted Men's Club opened in the city, featuring "an unlimited supply of Stateside beer, and mural paintings reminiscent of the gayest night spots of the speakeasy era." Additionally, a wide range of sports fields and facilities was established. To bolster "troop morale in the overcrowded Far Eastern city," it was believed that "an active training program amplified by an equally intense athletic schedule" was essential. General Thomas added, "If you feed them and keep them busy, that keeps the trouble down."[26] Tianjin boasted twelve softball fields, five baseball diamonds, a nine-hole golf course, and a track by 1946.[27] In Qingdao, the military converted the Japanese baseball field to an American football field and organized parties at the stunning white sand beach resorts left by their German and Japanese predecessors. In Nanjing and Shanghai, enlisted men played ball games with Chinese amateur or college teams and attended regular dance parties and weekend social events organized by the military.[28] Although the primary goal was to keep the homesick soldiers occupied or away from more dangerous activities, these sports and social events were also used as a type of cultural and public diplomacy to cultivate alliance, showcase postwar peace and prosperity, and represent American democratic and egalitarian ideals. However, in the eyes of locals, American troops' occupation of or exclusive access to privileged residential and entertainment sites continued the colonial tradition of treaty ports, which had used sports to assert masculinity and racial superiority.[29]

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American troops resided in designated modern hostels and hotels, former foreign concessions, university campuses, and guesthouses built for them, along with other premier sites equipped with modern facilities. This extensive use placed a strain on local resources. State Department officials reported that anti-American sentiment grew in Beijing and Tianjin as the Chinese were "called on to provide a lot of extra houses" for American military forces, a situation further exacerbated by the recent influx of dependents.[30] A particularly contentious issue involved the marines' acquisition and occupation of former Japanese properties. In heated lease-renewal negotiations over the use of part of the Shandong University campus as marine billets, the US Navy authorities defended the marines' continued occupation – despite sparking student protests – by claiming that "the very existence of the University is in considerable measure due to the presence of those Marines."[31] Similarly, in Tianjin, the marines refused the Chinese request to vacate a former Japanese staff residence that they were using as billets. Marine leadership defended their stance by citing the strategic importance of the location, the scarcity of alternative housing options, and a policy that "Marines pay no rent in conformity with policy of American movements in China relative to use of ex-enemy property." Frederick W. Hinke, the American consul in Tianjin, expressed a clear sense of entitlement in his letters to the embassy: "Cannot perceive how Chinese convenience can be permitted to take precedence over essential American military needs." He further emphasized, "I have yet to learn of any military organization which has ever considered it had to pay for enemy 'military property' requisitioned by it, even after a cessation of hostilities. . . . The Chinese seem to regard the Marines as paying guests with emphasis on the 'pay.'" Hinke voiced his "annoyance" with the Chinese Ministry of Economic Affairs for taking the matter directly to the American Foreign Office and pointed fingers at the Nationalists: "Now that the Japanese supply is virtually exhausted, the vultures are looking for more carrion."[32]

In addition to occupying privileged housing, US troops expected and savored extra resources and special treatments. In Qingdao, US military authorities insisted they should not pay for the utilities provided for their servicemen and the harbor maintenance, as they were invited to stay in the city.[33] In Shanghai, where the municipal government imposed feast and hotel taxes at a 20 percent rate and an amusement tax at a 30 percent rate, many GIs refused to pay. In fact, it was not just individual soldiers who refused to pay these taxes, citing inflation and exploitation by local merchants, or due to their "ignorance of Chinese laws and regulations."[34] Authorities of the US Forces in China claimed that United States Army personnel were granted exemption from such levies by Chiang Kai-shek.

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This exemption was also justified by the nature of the American military missions in China, whose sole purpose was said to be assisting the Chinese government at its request.[35] While claiming special status, US servicemen also sometimes insisted on "equal" treatment. For instance, when confronted with Shanghai's ballooning prices for food and entertainment, Navy Lieutenant Phil Bucklew, a senior shore patrol officer, took matters into his own hands. Accompanied by two GI investigators – a former Wisconsin football star and a national collegiate wrestling champion from Purdue – and with the support of the Military Police (MP), he declared the luxurious Park Hotel dining rooms "out of bounds" and "stuck to his guns" until the hotel management agreed to cut prices by 50 percent. General Wedemeyer also pledged to "smash this exploitation of Americans."[36] In general, American soldiers saw these demands as legitimate rights rather than special privileges. Like the extraterritorial legal protection and the jurisdiction to try war criminals, American requests for immunities and exemptions were based on the argument of reciprocity.[37]

It seemed a happy ending when *Stars and Stripes* publicly thanked the mayor of Shanghai in March 1946 for granting GIs an exemption from the feast and hotel taxes, with a "Thank You, Mayor" headline.[38] But the American sense of entitlement permeated official communications and affected individual GIs' expectations regarding seeing, smelling, tasting, hearing, and touching China.

## In Search of Old China

At the first sight of Shanghai, Elmo R. Zumwalt Jr., then a navy lieutenant, observed: "The river banks were green and beautiful," and "China was one place which lived up to preconceived notions."[39] It was not uncommon to see Westerners project a preindustrial tranquility and a lifestyle free from technological dominance or Western influence onto war-torn China. Through a romanticizing lens, "China was a timeless land," "people were not rushing through life as victims of a timeframe set by machines," and, "on a whole, daily life moved unhurriedly along just as it had for centuries."[40] It was a picturesque land frozen in time, captured by foreign tourists' eyes, and resembling images from *National Geographic*, *Life*, Pearl S. Buck's novels, and wartime propaganda films: "various rice paddies going up the mountain, giant bamboo growing, fast-running mountain streams, little clusters of villages."[41]

Once they got settled into their new duties, GIs, who had ample liberty, went on sightseeing tours of the Forbidden City, the Temple of Heaven, and the Great Wall, among other ancient treasures. Two other sights that

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featured in GI accounts were rickshaw men and women with bound feet. "It was fascinating to watch the human show pass through and around the station," including "several elderly women hobbl[ing] past with the tottering stiff-kneed gait of those who had their feet bound since infancy."[42] The act of "watching" turned into a fad as GIs looked for these women everywhere and even requested locals' help in finding them. To the initial surprise and disappointment of some newcomers, Chinese streets were not filled with bound feet or pigtails, as portrayed in Hollywood movies. The chances of spotting such phenomena were rendered even slimmer after the Chinese government prohibited local interpreters from taking GIs on trips in search of such scenes in more rural areas, stating that these activities would damage the image of China and harm national dignity.[43] Yet these young men soon found something far more accessible to photograph: the rickshaw. Servicemen routinely took rides while on liberty and also enjoyed racing each other when pulling rickshaw men. The GIs' patronage reenergized the declining business of rickshaw pulling in Chinese cities, which had been threatened both by competing forms of transportation and by repeated government attempts to ban what many reformers saw as a backward social institution and national humiliation.

The exotic old China was not only observed and documented in letters and tales; it was also worn, embodied, and taken home via souvenirs. Sailors came ashore in Shanghai to get dragons sewn onto the cuffs of their blue jackets and underneath the flap.[44] Officers and soldiers alike went out antique hunting for silk, vases, carved wooden cases, embroidered shoes, copper Buddhas, and jade necklaces. The GIs wore old gowns featuring dragon embroidery from the Peking opera, donned traditional silk caps, and held Chinese pipes while sitting straight on tricycles or pulling rickshaws. Led by the so-called old China hands with a touch of "Chinowledge," their younger pals were said to have stormed the burial clothing stores and bought out the entire stock of ingot-shaped pillows for the dead and outdated hookahs, now priced ten times higher, in order to "show off the 'exotic world' to their loved ones back home" (see Figures 2.4 and 2.5).[45]

A popular destination for fine-quality souvenirs, China was also seen as a major hub for cheap and fake goods, with American soldiers learning that "the majority of the confidence rackets originated in China," from hand-carved "antique" wooden chests that split as soon as they were placed in a warm room, to liquor bottles refilled with local concoctions and given Johnnie Walker seals and empty beer cans transformed into beautifully made "sterling" filigree jewelry.[46] Despite the outdatedness of "Oriental products" that GIs demanded, many of which were no longer used in actual Chinese life, businesses happily recreated products and

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Figure 2.4 A marine in a Chinese cap checks out goods from a street vendor. MCHD.

services that catered to American tastes. Store names changed to "Alaska, TIPTOP, PEiHAi, GISMO, America, and other sorts of weird names," and were decorated with new Orientalist aesthetics. Stepping into a Qingdao bar, for example, one immediately encountered new vermillion curtains with embroidered yellow flowers reaching the floor, dragons on two fake columns, and four or five palace lanterns in red gauze, all aimed at creating an ersatz "Oriental atmosphere."[47] While encountering the old China for the first time, marines also found themselves "back at the old stand," a place their predecessors had helped shape. At Hempel's – the legendary hangout of the old-time leathernecks of the legation guard, located across from the old polo grounds in Beijing – marines jived to tunes from an ancient jukebox, celebrated hitting the jackpot on slot machines, and enjoyed the merry gurgling of beer, all with "a touch of home."[48]

In their daily encounters, American servicemen's visual representations and imaginings were steeped in overt Orientalist symbolism. Despite their frequent visits to grand restaurants, dance halls, and shopping malls as

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Figure 2.5 Local bumboats cluster around a Seventh Fleet cutter in Shanghai for business, September 1945. NARA.

magnificent as those in New York City, these soldiers made little reference to the modern sensations these sites evoked. Instead, it was the imagined ancient kingdom that showed up on the Chinese screen, which they were constantly and intensely looking at and looking for. Like white visitors touring America's Chinatowns with their fake opium dens and other staged "authentic" scenes, which gave them a feeling of superiority, a display of the old China helped confirm Americans' cultural and moral superiority and justify their postwar occupation.[49]

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## "Chinks' Stink"

While the peaceful and beautiful Orient was framed and wrapped, ready to be shipped home, China's everyday miasma was revealed to be unbearable and dangerous to both the nose and the mind. Stench, invading the senses with offensive odors, was the strongest sensory experience in GI accounts. City sewage was an utter disaster. No one taking a stroll in Shanghai could avoid the filthy, stinking Suzhou Creek surrounded by thousands of refugees living in little houseboats or junks and using the creek as a garbage dump, sewage disposal, and their sole source of water.[50] In the streets of Beijing, one easily ran into "honeydipper" carts that collected human excrement around the city, which was then sold to farmers as fertilizer. As one marine warned, "on a warm day it was prudent to detour past these carts to avoid the foul odor from the semi-liquid contents."[51] The countryside turned out to be even worse. "Whether it was animal or human waste, rotting vegetation or cooking odors, it all seemed to have a certain rank solidity that one had to accept and learn to live with or be constantly on the verge of gagging."[52] Overall, the "whole country smelled."[53]

The GIs' aversion to rancid smells was a result of modern America's own changing notions of odor, disease, and cleanliness. Stench had been increasingly associated with disease, lack of sanitation, and poor public health since at least the nineteenth century as industrialization in the Western world changed the urban landscape.[54] Odors of excrement and decaying human and animal corpses, which had pervaded the public and private spaces of the poor, drew considerable attention from the elites and social reformers. The fear of and policies against odors reflected popular understandings of disease and disease transmission, especially germ theories, which revolutionized understanding of odors. Meanwhile, throughout twentieth-century America, "the drive to bathe, shower, and deodorize spread throughout society," and "soaps, deodorants, and other hygiene products were at the forefront of mass consumer culture," constructing the "sweatless, odorless, and successful middle class."[55]

Notably, American soldiers' portrayals focused not on the industrial stench, but rather on the atavistic filth of old China, particularly the pungent stench emanating from excrement. The sniffers' attention to sewage and filth reflected fears of an archaic population before and outside civilization, rather than the common fear of urban degeneration in the Western world. Smells are subjective, conditional, and markers of Otherness, and one's own smell is rarely regarded as stink.[56] Soldiers seemed to have forgotten that they themselves had recently "looked so filthy and bedraggled in the steaming heat on Peleliu's rugged ridges and

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in the corpse-reeking morass at Shuri, Okinawa."[57] Instead, they turned all the attention of their nostrils to Chinese odors.

In the accounts of American military men, China's stench and squalor were not only linked to the poor, as begging children, homeless refugees, and ragged urchins filled up modern cities and polluted creeks, but also often went hand in hand with Chinese culture. They were shocked to see "how cheaply human life is sometimes held," ranging from an "often brutal and callous approach to life in China" to "absolute disregard for life" even among friends and families. Horrifying stories included a farmer who, after his donkey cart toppled down an incline, rushed to check on his donkey first before turning to his family. Another account described a mother who tossed an infant under the wheels of a reversing US truck, seeking compensation, as "a girl baby was another mouth to feed." More understanding minds noted the impact of war and violence on Chinese society, such as economic devastation, dislocation, and human suffering, which were rarely experienced in American lives. As one explained, "Survival is said to be the primary driving force in every human life, a fact that is often almost forgotten in our middle class American existence," and "the sanitation a westerner was accustomed to simply didn't exist."[58] But most still linked the stench and suffering of the poor to inherent flaws and human cruelty within local society. In these representations, the Chinese stench became an indication of the country's backwardness, being unaffected by modernity, and was ultimately attributed to racial inferiority.

In fact, "filthy Chinese" had been a powerful narrative since the nineteenth century, as adopted by Western observers and even Chinese reformers.[59] Odors were used as the markings of peoples and civilization. In America, Chinatowns had long been associated with stench, providing further evidence of Chinese "purported racial inferiority" and "grounds for their exclusion."[60] Caucasian noses associated Chinese food with the strange odors of the East, including "squid, rats, and offal, all of which were regarded as embodying the strange and repulsive lifestyle and diet of the Chinese."[61] Befitting a colonial narrative, whiteness signified cleanliness, purity, and health, while Chineseness was marked as inherently repugnant. In postwar Japan, "disgust dominated the affective palette of occupation soldiers," contributing to ways in which boundaries between Americans and the occupied were redrawn in the chaotic aftermath of the war.[62] Despite China's allied status, GIs were also preconditioned to sniff the "Chinks' stink," and stench became a dominant mode through which they experienced the Chinese universe, enforcing preexisting notions of national and civilizational hierarchies. In a way, the Chinese stench continued to spread as a racialized smell in the postwar era.

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As Susan L. Carruthers has aptly shown in her study of the American occupation of Japan, "latrines were indeed the measure of men – a yardstick by which civilizational standards could readily be appraised."[63] Discussions on human waste and the toilet were at the forefront of the China stench, including the official guide that cautioned soldiers that "throughout China toilet facilities are by our standards worse than primitive."[64] Indeed, one of the initial assaults GIs encountered in China turned out to be not from armed Japanese troops, but rather from squat toilets. One marine described the toilet on a train from Tanggu to Tianjin as "the subject of much discussion among the troops ... there was no seat, and the toilet bowl was recessed into the floor." But quickly the excitement over "a source of fascination" descended into disgust with the odor, due to "a lack of all types of maintenance" that "was typical of Chinese trains."[65] The exotic turned out to be not so benign, but a menacing cultural shock. While performing their initial task of transporting Nationalist soldiers, American servicemen further encountered the olfactory assault from the Chinese troops, who were described as "urinating on the deck, and even in the scuttlebutts; sitting on urinal troughs to bathe; dipping toothbrushes into water in the heads when cleaning their teeth; taking showers fully clothed; expectorating on decks and bulkheads all over the ship; throwing uneaten rice on the deck; standing instead of sitting on toilet seats, thus distributing fecal material over a wide area; and occasionally failing to use toilets at all."[66]

Americans took pride in their modern plumbing technology. Yet to make a flush toilet work, there were in fact many technological hurdles to cross: water pipes, pumps, screws, many little pieces that made up the miraculous invention. Flushing toilets were found in the modern city of Shanghai as early as the 1880s, but their usage remained limited in the country as a whole. Most of the interior lacked access to running water and the majority of the urban populations still used the traditional system of Chinese latrines, including various types of pit latrines, bucket toilets, and chamber pots. After the war, most people continued to use covered or open-air outhouses and public toilets, or simply resorted to open defecation. Manure collectors gathered feces from people's houses and public toilets and then sold them to farmers.

In urban centers, American officers and soldiers resided in designated places that had access to Western-style toilets linked to running water, indoor plumbing, and an underground sewage system. While they enjoyed modern conveniences and comfort, physically separated from the majority of the locals' living conditions, they remained wary of the potential dangers that the permeating Chinese stench posed to their health and safety. In response, they initiated cleaning campaigns to eradicate the threat and reform local bodies. For mosquito and insect control, the American military

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conducted aerial spraying in major cities, including Nanjing, Qingdao, Beijing, and Guangzhou, with the consent of Chinese authorities. However, they also initiated actions that were unsolicited and unwelcomed by the local population. In Nanjing, members of the Army Advisory Group requested the municipal government to spray all the farm fields and soil pits surrounding their residence with DDT, as well as remove the soil pits. Angry representatives from the local silkworm industry protested that such unrestricted DDT spraying would kill worms and put peasants' livelihoods in danger. Even the accommodating local officials, who had conducted several on-site investigations, felt that it was impossible to entirely eradicate the more than one hundred soil pits.[67] When GIs shared living space with the Chinese, direct action was often taken. While transporting Nationalist soldiers, US medical officers used DDT powder to delouse them before embarkation. At the same time, a lesson on using the bathroom was given. The war against the Japanese might be over, but another battle needed to be launched against the "Chinks' stench," as "indiscriminate vomiting from seasickness, coupled with the Chinese body odor and the uriniferous atmosphere made this desirable."[68] Though on a much smaller scale, these demands and actions presented a striking resemblance to the sanitizing projects to reform foreign bodies that the American military imposed, in the postwar period, on occupied enemy nations, who were "to experience defeat in the most humiliatingly intimate fashion."[69]

Smells are pedagogical as they demarcate self and other and help justify one's actions to reform others. The Americans were not the only ones who attempted sensory reforms on Chinese bodies. For example, the New Life Movement, officially launched by Chiang Kai-shek in 1934, also propagated rinsing and brushing teeth, cutting nails, and bathing regularly, and forbad spitting on the street or urinating in public as part of living a clean, sanitized, modern, and moral life.[70] However, the smellscapes of China in American servicemen's nostrils were considered uniformly foul and innately backward. Rather than for nation-building, smell was invoked to confirm racial and national hierarchies.

## Food Hogs the Limelight

CHAMPAGNE BAR
BEST DRINKS, FRESH FOODS
WITH BEAUTIFUL WAITRESS
RESONABLE PRICE
15 RACE COURSE ROAD
TUNGLOU TIENTSIN

– Norman G. Albert, *Yohouse from a Boot to a China Marine*, 2011[71]

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It is only natural that people far away from home seek familiar cuisine to satisfy their palates, as taste is one of the most enduring sensations humans long for and remember. With the empire's industrial boom and global reach, the US military tried to recreate a healthy and familiar gastronomic world for its servicemen afar, including C and K ration packs of combat food and B rations for field kitchens. The GIs were "the best fed in the world during the Second World War," as "the standard ration provided on military bases contained a staggering 4,300 calories," and "men at the front were allocated 4,758 calories a day."[72]

Interestingly, eating was also one of the few areas of life where American soldiers were more willing to leave their comfort zones, out of necessity, curiosity, or a combination of both. If GIs disdained China's smells, most loved Chinese food, regardless of their rank or status. During the war, Chinese dinner was served once weekly in the US Army headquarters in Chongqing, showing "how popular Chinese food is with these Yanks."[73] After the war, for veterans from the Pacific, who had become fed up with the concentrated packages that left extremely unpalatable aftertastes, fresh food was their top priority upon reentering civilization.[74] American servicemen hired houseboys to cook and clean and ate in restaurants when they had liberty, or had a friend bring takeout while they were on duty. When it came to food and service, they were "living in the splendor."[75] Upon arrival in Shanghai on October 14, 1945, pilot Warren Jefferson Arnett was struck by "the pool of nationalities and types, with its French, Italian and Russian quarters ... at least one restaurant in each where you get the food typical of the country." He tried Viennese food and ate at a restaurant called the White House that was run by Jewish refugees from Germany.[76] Food provided a direct gateway into China and exposed GIs to a new culinary world beyond "the Anglo-Saxon model of meat and two vegetables" as served up in the homogenous American military canteen meals.[77]

There were plenty of banquets for all ranks. The Chinese government promoted cultural diplomacy to enhance Sino-US understanding, and feasting was always a priority (see Figure 2.6). Local elites were encouraged to open their homes to the Americans with the hope that "a taste of the Chinese home-cooked food" and "a glimpse of the Chinese home life" might help eliminate some of the "distorted ideas about Chinese life and views."[78] Chinese officials frequently invited American officers to banquets to show appreciation, and solders also attended various victory parties characterized by long feasts. In fact, both sides used food to create trust and rapport among allies and hostile groups. In the north of Qinhuangdao, a certain Captain Wu of the Nationalist army became an "instant devotee" of a chocolate powder drink a marine detachment

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Figure 2.6 United States military leadership, including Admiral Charles M. Cooke Jr., accompanied by Chinese hosts, enjoying a Mongolian barbeque at the Summer Palace in Beijing, 1945. MCHD.

officer offered him, which kept the "mutual friendship strong" and "cooperation close," despite the fact that initially neither could understand a word of the other.[79] In a similar story, food provided a safe pathway for marines at risk. Thomas E. Williams, an officer based in Qingdao, attributed the success of his rescue mission of three captured

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American aviators from the Communist territory to "the help of quite a lot of chefoo brandy," which had created "the friendliest Chinese communists everyone has ever seen."[80] This food diplomacy predated Richard Nixon's "chopsticks diplomacy" in his successful state banquet that resulted in the historic Sino-US détente.

The ubiquity and everydayness of eating makes it a significant site of sentient interaction, as food cultures are directly shaped by class, race, and nationality. As a powerful way to forge and highlight group identities, food was also used to create connections that blurred divisions. Chinese cuisine provided fresh alternatives to American industrial food as well as novel tastes, experiences, and identities. In 1940s America, Chinese food was still associated with the cheap and convenient, consumed by middle-class and less-privileged groups. As part of the lingering influence of racial prejudice, it had been denigrated by anti-Chinese forces in the nineteenth century and continued to be targeted by white health experts and officials.[81] Many GIs who came to China yearning for chop suey – a stereotypical dish created in America and adapted for American tastes – now realized that "we never had real Chinese food before, although all along we thought so."[82] Although some restaurants in China also sold chop suey during and after the war, the dish was advertised as an "authentic American" food instead.[83] Now among the most popular Chinese dishes were "sweet and sour pork or spare ribs cooked in any provincial style, roast duck Szechwan style, fried eel Shanghai style, and bamboo shoots."[84] Sometimes, the dishes not only went beyond white Americans' usual palate, but also against their knowledge of health and received medical advice. After an inspecting medical service officer objected to its black mold coverage, dry-cured ham from Yunnan was banned from dining tables. After strong protests, the famous Chinese ham triumphantly returned to the GI restaurant run by the Nationalist Government. Eventually, even the inspector was won over by its irresistible taste and took two of the black hams home.[85]

For many American soldiers in China, almost all white, eating fancy Chinese food was a physical and cultural experience of its own, rich in flavors and palate sensations. Together with more affluent Chinese families or at fine restaurants, they "ate, sometimes with hesitation, items strange to the American table but most excellent in flavor. Jellylike, dark green and black 'Hundred Year Old Eggs,' fish stew garnished with chrysanthemum petals, a rice pudding type dish containing nuts and lotus seeds along with other unidentified ingredients, and bird's nest soup rivaled one another for 'most exotic' title, made from the bird's spittle."[86] In contrast to Americans, who were not receptive to the idea of offal even during meat-rationed wartime, the Chinese ate ducks' feet and

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Figure 2.7 Two American servicemen on liberty examining raw ducks for their Peking duck dish at a local restaurant. MCHD.

chickens' feet tied with lengths of intestine; pig ears; fish heads; congealed pig, chicken and duck blood; and sea slugs, all of which were considered delicacies (see Figure 2.7).[87] Additionally, their ways of cooking, serving, and eating were also a source of marvel. There was a mix of appreciation and discomfort toward local table manners. One officer described the Chinese art of eating: "Two beautiful pieces of ivory adroitly moved by five slender fingers is a poem in simple movement."[88] In contrast, an army verse vividly portrays the attitude to chopsticks of many an ordinary GI Joe: "Some use them like a pair of tweezers; Some use them like a shovel; But some, preferring tools to teasers, Get in the bowl and grovel."[89]

Although the Chinese were widely celebrated as "famous cooks," the danger associated with food in China could not be overstated. During the first few weeks of their landing, many GIs fell victim to intestinal bugs they dubbed "Genghis Khan's Revenge," reputed to be far worse than the "Montezuma's Revenge" encountered in Mexico.[90] Locals were believed to have developed "an immunity to many of the diseases that kill the white man so easily." Therefore soldiers were to "assume all food and all water is contaminated," as human manure was universally used in China for fertilizer. Counterfeit liquor proved another major threat, at times causing serious hazards.[91] The official marine guide warned: "Probably the

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liquor poured out in your presence from a bottle bearing a reputable brand name is some horrible mixture that will do more to you than you bargained for. The Oriental dispenser of fire water is a clever hombre, to whom the word conscience is a joke."[92] In response to these risks, inspection teams of officers and doctors evaluated local venues, including kitchens, for sanitary conditions and overall hygiene. Establishments deemed suitable or unsuitable for soldiers' liberty time were marked with "In-Bounds" or "Out-of-Bounds" signs at their entrances, with the system enforced by the shore patrol and MPs. Sometimes, checklists were provided to troops instead of placing signs, as the latter practice was criticized by local authorities for intruding on Chinese sovereignty.

Even so, Chinese liquor presented further hazards, as American servicemen often fell victim to unfamiliar drinks or drinking rituals. The army handbook cautioned the imprudent against engaging in drinking bouts with seemingly mild-mannered Chinese hosts, noting that various local liquors were much stronger than expected.[93] In one incident, a red-haired chief warrant officer, shortly after consuming a second glass of the grain distilled beverage "*bi-gan*," fell over and required ten stitches in the lower rear area.[94] The drinking ritual of "bottoms up," or "*gan bei*" (*gum-bay*, *kan-pei*, *gum pei*) also proved particularly risky. Some GIs saw "bottoms up" as a local tradition and an expression of hospitality where forcing liquor and food on reluctant guests was a sign of a successful party, an opportunity for winning friendships, or making business go more smoothly. But others found "this Chinese style of drinking" game difficult to win, especially when outnumbered and consuming local liquor, with some bitterly questioning whether it was a trick to intoxicate them and make them look foolish.[95] Overall, getting drunk in front of the Chinese was seen as a major source of embarrassment or even humiliation.

Food did not just feed people but could also feed mutual grievances. During the Cairo Conference, President Franklin D. Roosevelt met with Chinese official Huang Renlin (Huang Jen-lin), who was responsible for the billeting and subsistence of American soldiers. The president inquired about the troops' well-being, particularly whether they were indeed being fed buffalo meat: "Can you really eat buffalo meat? Isn't it too tough?" In response, Huang explained that beef was not a staple in China, and due to shortages, alternatives like water buffalo and even wild yak were provided. But he assured the president that with proper cooking and an excellent recipe, these alternatives could be quite tasty – so much so that "the boys have not noticed the difference."[96] This amusing personal and diplomatic exchange reflected the drastically different food cultures of beef in the two countries. In the United States, beef was highly valued as a prime source of energy and considered essential for a proper meal. In fact, beef

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accounted for 65 percent of the designated required meat intake for GIs in China, compared to 30 percent for pork and 5 percent for eggs.[97] In contrast, everyday beef consumption inside China remained uncommon in the 1940s, both for economic and for cultural reasons.[98] The more important unspoken political context, however, was the ongoing Sino-US dispute over American food consumption in China. Huang Renlin was the director of China's War Area Service Corps, which provided for a variety of American servicemen in a hostel network from 1941 to 1946. Based on agreements, China paid for food and lodging for GIs in China, as part of the reverse lend-lease and reciprocal benefit to the United States aid. However, the two sides continued to disagree on the proper outlay and the type of currency for payment. The American military often found Chinese service did not meet US standards and attributed such inadequacy or failure to Chinese graft and incompetency. In contrast, the Chinese side took their payment as a gesture of generosity and took pains to maintain GIs' lifestyles by straining finances and making sacrifices, such as exhausting local beef supplies. During his visit to America in June 1944, Minister of Finance Kung Hsiang-hsi, American educated and Chiang's brother-in-law, complained in a full-dress conference that one American soldier cost as much as five hundred Chinese soldiers, and "very soon there won't be any animals left to help the farmers farm their land."[99] This sentiment was shared by Chinese officials at all levels of government, who believed excessive American consumption and unfair demands were placing a huge financial burden on China and revealed at least partial disregard of Chinese livelihoods. While well-fed and well-dressed GIs had plenty of beef, eggs, milk, alcohol, cigarettes, and candies, Chinese soldiers ate rice, bamboo roots, and pickles and looked small, malnourished, and filthy.[100]

Such food disputes cast a shadow over Sino-US relations throughout the war and continued into the postwar era, when UNRRA clashed with the Chinese National Relief and Rehabilitation Administration over distribution of surplus war supplies and relief goods in China. Food politics extended far beyond the store, kitchen, and dining room, reaching the cattle farmland, the slaughterhouse, and presidential memos and national treaties. The amount of food consumed and what kind were markers of hierarchy. In postwar China, food served as an intimate contact zone where personal and national diplomacy unfolded. Sometimes, it was exchanged as gifts, gestures of friendship, or a gateway to rapport and life. Other times, food became a site of accommodation and tension where issues of taste, health, equality, and fairness were contested.

Despite the long-term American prejudice against Chinese food and military warnings against contamination, food choices that servicemen

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made revealed how preconceived racial and cultural boundaries were often transcended by actual interactions. As enlisted men tasted a greater variety of food in China, and much more routinely, they began to judge it from culinary rather than merely racial criteria. After the war, the return of US servicemen from China and other parts of Asia led to a boom in Chinese restaurant businesses and the popularity of Chinese food. Thanks to growing sales of frozen and processed products, the cuisine became a major national food in the United States by the 1950s.[101] In 1953, retired Army Brigadier General Frank Dorn, an old China hand who had served as aide to General Joseph W. Stilwell in the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theater, published a cookbook to show his love for food and marveled most of all about Chinese dishes.[102] Julia Child, the famed American chef and author in the postwar American culinary scene, said that she became interested in eating while serving in China, "where the food was so good."[103] She and her husband, Paul Child, had worked for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in China, where they enjoyed a variety of authentic Chinese dishes and both became enthusiastic about the cuisine. In addition to Chinese American pioneers, veterans from Asia might be a less visible but important contributor to the transformation of Chinese cuisine from an inferior ethnic food, which a middle-class white family felt culturally or socially embarrassed to embrace, to one associated with metropolitan tastes, global identity, and even fine dining.[104]

## Soundscape

**No Cuttee, No Savvy**
Sign on a Tientsin barber shop:
"Marines heads cut off here.
Ladies heads cut fine."

– *The North China Marine*, November 10, 1945

On September 12, 1945, an American gunboat opened fire at two speeding Japanese PT boats close to the Huangpu shore, marking the navy's triumphal entry into Shanghai. After "our shots broke a tranquil silence," according to Lieutenant Zumwalt, "almost as though it had been prearranged, the Chinese multitudes sent up a cheer and shout of welcome that was a roar. Small steam launches sounded their sirens, their craft twisted and turned like happy animals showing their pleasure. Crowds waved and whistled."[105] The heroic sounds of liberation were full of excitement. Behaving "like a bunch of boys on a weekend outing," the newly arrived marines were "shouting greetings to the curious

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Chinese" they saw in the train station. None spoke English, but they "kept smiling and saying 'Ding hao very good.'"[106] Crowds in Qingdao were "yelling and screaming, trying to touch us, and tossing things up to us as a goodwill gesture."[107] In Shanghai, "you walk down the street and people clap and ask for your autograph. Every American is a hero."[108] One old woman combined "the only three words of English she apparently knew into an inane and joyous litany, 'Hello – thank you.' Hello – thank you.' 'Hello – thank you.' It was almost as though this woman, in her withered crackle, was providing the symbolic lyrics for the stark melody of the multitude."[109]

Once US servicemen settled into their billets and camps in the city, they were immediately exposed to a cacophony of unregulated sound. Outside the gates was a blast of honking, grunting, ranting, moaning, prayers, and happy "jabbering and gibberish."[110] There was the "constant murmuring of countless conversations and the shouts of the camel drivers, peddlers and rickshaw coolies," who "all looked and sounded as though time had stood still" since the eighteenth or nineteenth century. Rickshaw pullers yelled at each other in competition over customers, or at passengers to negotiate a price. Vendors, flower girls, and beggars followed rich Americans, constantly shouting, "GI Joe." A Jewish stallholder yelled, "Hot dogs! Hot dogs!" and a suspicious White Russian spoke English "with an accent more Brooklynese than our buddies who were natives of Brooklyn."[111] Overall, Shanghai was home to tens of thousands of refugees after the Russian Revolution and Jews who escaped the Holocaust. These accounts of verbal and nonverbal sounds, familiar or unintelligible, a source of fascination and annoyance, formed the rich soundscape of postwar China, blending elements of premodern chaos with cosmopolitan diversity.

The most common and unique auditory experience for a GI was pidgin English, the lingua franca on the street. A simplified and limited contact language with reduced grammatical structure and vocabulary, pidgin English originally developed in China's southern coasts in the colonial trade era. Postwar cities offered ample opportunities for the patois. Businessmen in urban centers had been serving foreigners for decades, and American soldiers were greeted inside shops by enthusiastic salesmen using fluent yet pidgin expressions. English prep schools became a booming industry, and new pidgin English textbooks kept appearing. Most locals acquired the language in real-life settings, however. Houseboys and workers who had direct and frequent contact with GIs were among the first to learn. A marine's houseboy in Beijing who could not speak a single word of English quickly became "that Chink that speaks English with an Alabama accent," due to his friendship with a Southern soldier. Another houseboy

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in Qingdao innocently mimicked the marines' impatient calls of "let's go" by saying *lao si gou* (老死狗) in Chinese, which means "old dead dog."[112] Even beggars on the street "who trotted along begging plaintively for a hand out" all started calling "Cumshaw Joe, Cumshaw Joe."[113] A fast learner, one child thief in Tianjin who always waited outside a marine station for a chance could in three weeks curse "in recognizable English . . . 'Hey Joe. YOU BOO HOW YOU SON-A-DITCH [You no good you son of a bitch]!'"[114] As Chinese civilians utilized their pidgin English, Americans also picked up the lingo and even developed their own version of "pidgin Chinese." For example, instead of the Chinese standard greeting of "Have you eaten?" you would now "often hear these men in khaki say, '*hao pu hao*?' which literally means 'good, no good,' as their translation of the standard English greeting "How do you do?"'[115] In a Chinese satire of "pidgin Chinese," a foreigner translated his Chinese friend's title "*dui zhang*" (Captain) as "*bing tou*" 兵頭, but mispronounced it as "*pin tou*" 姘頭, very close in sound, but meaning paramour instead.[116]

These ad hoc everyday communications involved multiple layers of interpretation and misinterpretation from both sides (see Figure 2.8).




Figure 2.8 Cartoon depicting a verbal exchange between a GI and a Chinese man. MCHD.

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"*Ding hao*" remained the most frequently used Sino-American phrase, usually accompanied by a thumbs-up. To US soldiers, the Chinese were shouting "*ding hao*" to show their appreciation, and in return, they adopted the authentic Chinese term to show their own goodwill. The American military even recommended using it to build rapport. Yet most Chinese sources attribute the term's origin to wartime allies in the CBI Theater who started using the term, which was later adopted by Chinese civilians. Though *ding hao* appeared to be a Chinese term, it was neither a popular expression for "good," especially compared to alternatives like *hen hao* or *zui hao*, nor did it imply appreciation. Instead, it was a Sino-American co-creation, out of mutual misunderstanding, which became a catchphrase that kept evolving as Americans would modify the phase according to the degree of excitement into *ding hao*, *ding ding hao*, and *ding ding ding hao*, though *ding* already indicates the upmost.[117]

The history of "gung ho," meaning "enthusiastic and eager" in standard English today, further reveals the mixed nature of the Sino-American exchange. The term was introduced into American English in 1942 by Lieutenant Colonel Evans Fordyce Carlson when training a new marine battalion in guerrilla tactics inspired by Chinese Communist forces. Carlson had previously served as the first American military observer with the Chinese Communist army during 1937 and 1938. His remarkable exploits against the Japanese later became the subject of the Hollywood film *Gung Ho! The Story of Carlson's Makin Island Raiders*. However, in Chinese, "gung ho" is "neither a slogan nor a battle cry; it is only a name for an organization," a contraction of Chinese Industrial Cooperatives Movements (the acronym for Industrial Cooperation). In other words, it was mistakenly translated by Carlson, and then mistakenly used by American servicemen to greet the Chinese. This often led to Chinese politely shouting "gung ho" back without knowing exactly what it meant. At other times, the Chinese simply "grinned broadly and bowed," believing marines were saying "*Kung ho fa ts'ai*" instead, which means "Congratulations! May you gather wealth."[118] As one of the terms born during the war as marine slang, "gung ho" survived as an Americanism and kept evolving from "work together" to mean "eager beaver" and "rough indiscipline." But "its several accepted American meanings have no resemblance whatever to the recognized meaning in the original language."[119]

One can only speculate about what the Chinese crowds thought when hearing these "Chinese words." But in these situations, body language, gesture, and context mattered more than the words themselves. To every party, these phrases might all sound like gibberish, but both sides were convinced they were speaking the other's language to show appreciation and friendship. The vocal communication showed a type of entangled

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relations in which both parties adopted pidgin and introduced new vocabularies into their own. As the two sides pronounced "the same" sounds back and forth, the origins and implications of these phrases remained ambiguous and unsettled. This process differed from a colonial encounter where sound was used to distance the colonizer and the colonized, as in the case of "Cooee," which was adopted and appropriated by Europeans from aboriginal Australian words in the late 1800s to bind the colonialists together.[120] Instead, these pidgin Chinese/English words traveled on a Mobius strip–like path on which it was impossible to locate the beginning or end, and their sounds and meanings continue to evolve in different local contexts.

Beyond the initial greetings of "*ding hao*" and "gung ho," American soldiers engaged in a more complex level of vocal and cultural exchanges using their limited pidgin to shop and live in China. The Chinese market, which often lacked a clearly marked price, was filled with constant bargaining. For instance, on an uneventful day in 1946, Second Lieutenant Simms, then serving in Headquarters Battalion, 1st Marine Division in Tianjin, walked down the street and wanted to buy a water glass in a local stall. His memoir recounts the exchange that ensued:

> "Hey Joe, hen how Joe!"
> "Boo yow." (I shake my head negatively.)
> "Hey Joe, you say how much Joe." (Vendor holds out a glass for inspection.)
> "Boo how, hen boo how!" (I point to an imperfection in the glass.)
> "Hey Joe, hen how! One dollow." (Vendor looks insulted and in a loud voice insists on the quality of his product.)
> "One dollar . . . ti quey!" (I look astonished then glare disparagingly at his wares.)
> "O.K. Joe, you say how much Joe." (Vendor starts the pricing.)
> (I hold up three fingers.) "Yuan" (Vendor snorts in disgust and mutters.)
> "One dollow Joe, hen how!" (Vendor puts glass down as if it is all over.)
> (I pause at the next stall looking at the items displayed there. The second vendor attempts to gain my interest. The first vendor, seeing I'm still in the area, continues rearranging his goods but finally tries again.)
> "Hey Joe, you say how much." (I shrug as if disinterested, then hold up four fingers.) "Yuan" (Vendor mutters some more and I can pick out "boo how" which is evidently his description of all Americans. I start to walk off slowly but repeat the offer once more. Vendor, seeing me move further away makes a counter offer.)
> "Hey Joe." (Vendor holds up five fingers.) "O.K. yuan."
> I walk back counting out the five yuan. He keeps muttering and is likely telling all in listening range that my family is a bunch of tightwads. He hands me the glass with many headshakes to show his unhappiness. I give him the money and receive the glass, then depart.

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With a few pidgin words and lots of body language, the sale seemed to have been successfully completed. We do not know how the Chinese vendor felt, but Simms contemplated whether it was worth going to "a lot of trouble" over a ten-cent glass and finally concluded, "But what the heck, I had bargained and my self-esteem had been increased by my brilliant dickering."[121]

In the mundane practice of bargaining, everyday actors like a GI and a Chinese street hawker engaged in creative and loaded negotiations. These routine interactions over "fair trade" did not simply follow the logic of economics or even of the market. Instead, the contested values of these objects and experiences lay in both the material and the symbolic worlds, within which personal, national, and racial dignities were crucial measurements.[122] The "simple" but coded transaction was deeply shaped by different social, cultural, political, and moral systems. There were conflicting scripts to choose from: for example, a mutually beneficial sale among equal allies, an unfair trade between cunning Orientals and innocent Americans, and an imperialist act inflicted upon Chinese victims in a system of unequal treaties. This contingent moment could lead to a small profit, a memorable photo, and a funny story to tell, or to a quarrel, a punitive action, and a nationwide protest. It was precisely in this moment when a local merchant encountered a GI on the street that preexisting scripts were appropriated and turned into deeds, which shaped narratives, memories, and history.

To more sympathetic American participants, both sides walked away satisfied after long and exhausting negotiations, usually over a trivial object, and it was a comical story to share that ended with mutual satisfaction. This tale of success was consistent with the new American middlebrow intellectual representations of the era, highlighting mutually beneficial exchanges between Americans and Asians "within a system of reciprocity."[123] However, the implicit question of "fair trade" never ceased to haunt American narratives of the China trade. Even the marines' official guide included a specific instruction on shopping in China: "We Americans, almost alone among the great peoples of this world, feel a little ashamed about bargaining for things we buy," but we need to "get over that feeling in the Orient," "unless you enjoy being stung every time."[124] The suggestion seemed useful for reducing the losses of innocent servicemen abroad. However, there was only a thin line between a cunning merchant who "scrapes and bows, and bows and scrapes – Then throws the hooks into you" and an evil "Chinese con man" who always cheats.[125]

The era of WWII saw another rise in English idioms associated with China despite having vague or no actual Chinese connections. Terms like

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"Chinese whispers," "Chinese fire drill," and "Chinese home runs" emerged to describe situations that were confusing, incomprehensible, messy, or inferior. These phrases were rooted in racism dating back to the nineteenth century, when essentialized portraits of the Chinese characteristics became popularized through the works of missionary-sinologists like Arthur H. Smith and continued to be reproduced in American culture, including marine boot camps.[126] This same racial prejudice also gave rise to the stereotype of the "Chinese con man," a discourse perpetuated by American traders who characterized Chinese as "sly, untrustworthy, cowardly, dirty" and insisted they "must be treated as an inferior race, cowed by gunboats and arms." Theodore H. White, an influential journalist and former student of John King Fairbank at Harvard University, called this, the first of the three most powerful American myths about China, "the Treaty Port legend."[127] Trading is a prominent event in colonial narratives where the natives are either characterized as cheaters or as naive and dumb, ignorant of the real value of things, in both cases separating them from the fair trade model of white civilization.[128] In the larger context of unequal national and racial relations, being taken advantage of by the Chinamen stopped being harmless fun, a comical story to share, or a trivial matter of inconvenience. Instead, it became a personal and national humiliation that required pedagogical and punitive actions, providing justifications for political domination or even military actions. The Opium War, for example, began as a trade dispute and ended with the first of many unequal treaties that brought China into the world of Western imperialist domination. As such, American servicemen also learned that using threats, verbal and physical, seemed the right or only effective way to prevent deceit in business transactions. As one story goes, in a coal sale incident where a Chinese merchant repeatedly tried to cheat on weight, a sergeant finally loaded a "submachine gun with a loud click" and "pointed the muzzle at the manager's face." Afterward, "the manager was shaking with fear, but we had no more cheating."[129] A lesson must be taught.

As a result of such ingrained beliefs about their unreliability and deception, Chinese immigrants rarely achieved justice in the late nineteenth-century American legal system, especially when facing a white opponent, leaving immigrants with a "Chinaman's chance."[130] Half a century later, in the American trials that took place in China, Chinese witnesses still often went unheard or misheard. In the case of Shen Chong, who was raped by an intoxicated marine, a critical misuse of terminology occurred when the MP on duty that night testified that he did not receive any report of a rape accusation. During the trial, it was discovered that the American lieutenant might have misheard and misinterpreted the Chinese police

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saying "rape" (*qiang jian*) as "intercourse" (*he jian*), two drastically different descriptions set apart by one modifier.[131] After hearing the defendant's claim that the woman was thought to be a street prostitute, many China marines felt the whole thing was just the result of "a language mixup and too much liquor."[132] These hearing patterns show not only the American military's loose discipline and tolerance of sexual misbehavior, but also deep-rooted sociocultural biases and systemic discrimination that directly affected how American soldiers were hearing Chinese speech or talking to Chinese people. What was deemed noise and what was deemed credible information was subject to historical and often biased ears.

## Intimate Touches and Violent Contacts

The majority of GIs engaged in extensive material and bodily interactions with the Chinese populace. Officers and soldiers frequently intermingled with locals in ball games, dance parties, banquets, and victory parties organized by both sides, and in everyday settings such as bathhouses, barbershops, restaurants, hotels, entertainment sites, and the streets.[133] Despite prevailing fears over Chinese foulness and diseases, physical contact between American servicemen and Chinese civilians remained common. For just twenty-five American cents, a soldier could indulge in a hot bath, "with the bathing chores performed by an attendant, followed by a manicure and pedicure and a brisk massage," as he lay on a cot in a Turkish bathrobe. The lavish grooming ritual concluded with "a shampoo, haircut and shave."[134] For another twenty-five cents, he could get a shoeshine outside the YMCA or the MP station, or inside bars and restaurants. Occasionally, these interactions led to close relationships. For instance, after saving two drunk marines from missing their curfew one day, a street boy named Liu Chan Deh – who had been shining shoes for his familiar customers in a Russian bar – was adopted as a marine mascot. The nine-year-old orphan then found a new home at the Qingdao air base, living alongside the marines. Over time, the bond grew stronger, and Liu was eventually legally adopted by Sergeant Arthur Jack McCartney in order to bring him to the United States. On February 14, 1949, Liu left China with his new "father" and became Arthur Liu McCartney.[135]

While some of these interactions culminated in happy endings, others proved to be more complex and fraught with tension. Haptic encounters emerged as the most precarious form of everyday interaction and caused significant trouble for Sino-US relations. Sexual relations quickly developed into the most sensitive issue as members of all ranks engaged in

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intimate involvement with local women. In a country ravaged by war and filled with refugees and prostitutes, brothels quickly became a popular destination for soldiers who enjoyed ample liberty and attractive pay. As in occupied Japan and Korea, American soldiers in China took prostitution for granted and made only halfhearted efforts to contain venereal disease; regulations concerning prostitutes were rarely enforced. The huge discrepancy between the official policy and actual practice revealed the fragile and hypocritical lines that the US military pretended to draw. The proclaimed rigid racial, class, and physical boundaries were easily broken by the gentle and illicit touches. When it came to haptic protocols concerning Chinese women, the military issued conflicting guidelines: They were memorable dolls, on the one hand, and dangerous carriers of disease with hidden agendas, on the other. These ambiguous portraits also applied to the Chinese people in general: They were both allies in arms who shared many traits, and others who had very different bodies, diseases, and physical expressions. For example, "They do not like to be touched. They don't like to be slapped on the back, or even to shake hands," except for some of the "modern ones."[136] In reality, the purported respect for Chinese women and for allied relations often fell flat due to excessive alcohol use, cultural arrogance, racial discrimination, and, ultimately, a hypermasculine military culture that enabled systemic tolerance of sexual misbehavior.

Another major form of violent contact involved physical abuse. Incidents of American soldiers beating, stabbing, and firing at Chinese coolies and civilians were by no means rare. When surrounded by local crowds, unarmed GIs on liberty often felt unsafe, alarmed, and even threatened. This was not only because of the diseases the Chinese were supposed to carry, but also due to the belief that the Chinese formed dangerous mobs that tried to fool people with dishonest business practices, took advantage of foreigners' lack of local knowledge, and intimidated them into submission. Rickshaw pullers, who frequently dealt with American soldiers on liberty, especially drunken ones, became victims of some of the deadliest crimes. As an extension of the physical violence toward Chinese bodies, and often, in avoidance of direct engagements with them, GIs fired at locals who were suspected of theft and black-market dealing of American military goods.

In general, the US military prescribed and policed strict boundaries to safeguard the "American body," drawing sharp distinctions between "China stench" and "Oriental diseases," on the one hand, and American civilization, on the other. These limits were enforced through rigorous sanitation measures and disinfectant sprayed on Chinese locales and individuals, in-bounds and out-of-bounds markers for local sites, and

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the barbed wire–topped walls of military compounds that were patrolled by armed sentries who could fire at suspected trespassers. Touch, whether sensual or violent, represented the most perilous sensory experience. Serious incidents sparked strong anti-American sentiment and even nationwide protests. Given their significance, these intimate touches and deadly contacts will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters.

## Making Sense of the Senses

In 1947, veteran journalist Harold R. Isaacs, reflecting on his recent experiences with American soldiers in China, painted a grim picture of the tensions that had emerged: "The whole was a snarl of friction, prejudice, and hatred, and it has deepened since the end of the war." He also issued a prescient warning: "The results of it will be felt for a long time to come."[137] That same year, William W. Lockwood, future president of the Association for Asian Studies in the United States, who had served for eighteen months as an army officer in China, wrote that the "first venture in large scale American tourism in China" caused "many sour, even hostile, reactions to the Chinese." He asked: Did millions of returned young GIs "gain a sympathetic and tolerant understanding of that world? Or were their home town prejudices simply confirmed?"[138] These poignant reflections remind us of the lasting impacts of US military operations overseas, both on and through the soldiers who acted as their agents.[139]

In postwar China, US servicemen served both as armed forces performing military duties abroad and as tourists, consumers, cultural messengers, and ambassadors on the ground, there to represent US interests and values. They were also seen as both a military and a diplomatic force representing America by members of the Chinese population, who had rarely encountered Americans in their lives. Similar to their colonial predecessors, GIs largely maintained a privileged lifestyle separate from Chinese society. Orientalist views preconditioned their sensory experiences, shaping how they saw, smelled, tasted, listened to, and touched China; binary framings dominated their sensory narratives. As in other postwar occupied nations, the senses confirmed and reinforced existing sociocultural prejudices and helped maintain inherent inequalities based on race, nation, and civilization. The GIs' mental and sensory worlds were embedded with systemic biases toward the Chinese, sometimes perpetuated by the military itself. But they also "went native," and many embraced local food, touch, language, and culture. The purported physical, racial, and

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cultural boundaries became blurred through interactions with servants who washed clothes, cooked, and served, as well as elite and professional women who fraternized with foreign troops.

In their daily lives, American servicemen engaged in deeply historical and ideological acts, as when a GI Joe wore a queue on his head or donned "traditional" costumes that no Chinese would want; when a marine pulled a rickshaw with the rickshaw boy riding in it, shouting "*ding hao*" with a thumbs-up to Chinese passersby; and when an officer spent considerable time and energy negotiating with a street vendor over a cheap water glass. It was to experience China in a microcosm through sensory embodiment. They were mimicking "Chineseness," enacting scenes that were embedded in racial imagination, cultural fantasy, and geopolitical hierarchy. This complex exchange of languages, goods, values, and systems in the micro-contact zone of a street embodies the very entangled relations at the core of this study. These transactions did not simply conform to the logic of economics or the dictates of realpolitik. Rather, the contested values of these objects and experiences lay in both the material and the symbolic worlds, within which personal and national dignities were crucial measurements. If these exchanges foreshadowed the coming era of US expansion and global integration, their ultimate aim was to incorporate China into a hierarchical world order full of inequalities.

In China, the tale of postwar Sino-US reciprocity continued to be questioned in the micro-environment of the everyday, as Chinese civilians negotiated prices and payments with GIs, took advantage of the complex economic and cultural exchanges, challenged American pedagogy regarding sensory experiences, and undermined the US version of fairness and justice. In a relation of uneven reciprocity, Chinese soldiers and officers sometimes "listened to" an American officer, "but didn't always do what [he] suggested or asked or recommended that they do."[140] Lip service using pidgin language was paid at almost every level of communication. When the Chinese were shouting the same slogans as the Americans with big smiles, they seemed to be speaking the same language; however, they could also have been pretending – an act that often led to an American interpretation of "mutual satisfaction."[141] In more defiant instances, Chinese boys and girls who begged for cumshaw without success resorted to the "vilest cussing and evil" with their hand and eye movements.[142] A Chinese man gave the marine guards the finger, unzipped his pants, and peed on the compound's electric fence.[143] Perhaps the "real" Chinese were somewhere in between the two prevalent GI narratives: the deceitful business con men sporting disingenuous curiosities and grins, nodding and performing "*gan bei*" tricks; and the

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naive, comic, and incompetent firemen, who, after their chaotic failed attempts to put out the fire, were finally saved by the Americans with far superior skills and kept cheering, dancing around, and shouting, "*ding hao!*"[144] This, in fact, was the diverse array of ordinary Chinese people that American soldiers encountered – pedestrians, rickshaw pullers, prostitutes, dance girls, black-market customers and dealers, and thieves.

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