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STATE OF THE FIELD

"DEEP CHANGES IN INTERPRETIVE CURRENTS"? CHIANG KAI-SHEK STUDIES IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA[1]

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This essay explores the nature of the changing scholarship on Chiang Kai-shek, reviewing some of the established assessments which dominated writing about Chiang for much of the latter half of the twentieth century, but contrasting these with new assessments which are now emerging in both Chinese- and English-language scholarship. The authors examine the ways in which new access to the Chiang Kai-shek diaries, a changing cross-Strait relationship and new attempts to rehabilitate the Republican past in the People's Republic of China have all had major ramifications for scholarship on Chiang. They tease out some of the exciting new threads that such scholarship is leading to, but also ask questions about the limitations and shortcomings of some of the approaches that are now dominant in the field.

Keywords: Chiang Kai-shek; modern Chinese history; Republican China; historiography; Taiwan; Kuomintang; Guomindang

INTRODUCTION

As Jonathan Mirsky recently put it, "there is a bull market these days in Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek."[2] A series of events over the last decade – the much-publicized death of Madame Chiang in 2003; the deposition of Chiang Kai-shek's diaries at the Hoover Institution in 2004; and the publication of a number of new biographies in both Chinese and English about various members of the Chiang clan – has led to heightened levels of public and intellectual interest in Chiang, the likes of which have not been

We thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions and comments. The genesis for this article stemmed from the Queen's University August 2009 conference mentioned in the third footnote. We would like to acknowledge Emily Hill's contributions towards putting together the conference and the participants for inspiring this review article (and especially its final sections).

1 The phrase "deep changes in interpretive currents" is taken from Waldron 2009, p. 15.

2 Mirsky 2009.

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seen since the 1950s or, at any rate, since Chiang's death on Tomb Sweeping Day, 1975. Such interest has only increased since the 2011 centennial of the Xinhai Revolution. Historical sites associated with Chiang on the mainland and in Taiwan have been rehabilitated and re-opened to the public. Several academic conferences have been held to discuss Chiang's legacy, and more are scheduled to take place.[3] And funding has been allocated for the establishment of new centres and projects for the study of Chiang. As far as the study of the Chinese past is concerned, "great man history" seems to have been revived in some quarters, whereas in others, the Chiang materials have helped to build a more robust approach to understanding this leader's agency within the broader historical context.

To be sure, a number of debates that have emerged in the wake of this "bull market" have been seen before. There remains, for instance, a fascination with Chiang's relationship with the United States and individual Americans, and Chiang's life continues to be framed around 1949 – the year he "lost China".[4] Nonetheless, access to new sources has opened up often unforeseen avenues of scholarship (some of which shall be explored below) while methodological developments have also seen questions raised about how one approaches the study of what are often uniquely complex texts either written by or about Chiang, ranging from his war-time directives to the *shilüe* 事略 manuscripts.[5] Most important of all, however, have been marked generational and contextual shifts which have led to what might be described as a "post Cold-War" wave of Chiang Kai-shek scholarship in the West and "post cross-Strait divide" Chiang Kai-shek scholarship on the Chinese mainland and in Taiwan.

Some of us now involved in analysing either Chiang himself or the ways in which he is studied – including the authors of this review – came of age around the time of the Tiananmen Incident of 1989 and do not remember a world in which Chiang or his nemesis Mao Zedong lived. We do not necessarily have the same kinds of personal attachments to events such as the "fall of the mainland", the "White Terror" under Chiang's rule on Taiwan, or even Chiang's death as some of our predecessors might have had. We work in an academy in which cross-Strait research is not only possible but common, in which many of the taboos that once surrounded certain aspects of modern Chinese history

3 These include "Reassessing Chiang Kai-shek: An International Dialogue," held at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, in August 2009, which was jointly organized between the two authors of this paper and Emily Hill of Queen's University (and which was generously funded by a number of organizations, including the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada); the "International Symposium on Chiang Kai-shek and Modern China," held at Zhejiang University in Hangzhou, Zhejiang (April 2010), organized by Chen Hongmin of Zhejiang University; "Chiang Kai-shek: A Reassessment in the Light of New Sources," organized by Tai-chun Kuo, Ramon Myers, and Hsiao-ting Lin of the Hoover Institution at Stanford University; the "International Conference on Chiang Kai-shek's Diaries and the Study of Republican Chinese History," held in Taipei in December 2010, and organized by Lu Fangshang (see publication of the conference proceedings, Lu 2011); the "Chiang Kai-shek and the Re-creation of the Republic of China in Taiwan" workshop, held at Oxford University in May 2011; and an ongoing project and series of conferences organized by and held at Academia Sinica's Institute of Modern History, and headed by Huang Tzu-chin. Upcoming events include a joint conference at Zhejiang University co-hosted by the Historical Society for Twentieth-Century China (HSTCC) and the Centre for Chiang Kai-shek and Modern Chinese History (headed by Chen Hongmin), titled "Reinterpreting Actors, Beliefs, and Institutions: Transformation and Evolution of Chinese Society in a Changing World, 1912–2012," to be held 1–3 June 2012.

4 As the subtitle to Jonathan Fenby's *Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-shek and the China He Lost* (2003) reminds us, Chiang is still (as Brian Crozier saw him in 1976) the *Man Who Lost China*.

5 On the former, see Chang 2007, pp. 65–87; on the latter see Huang 2010.

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have been removed, and in which Republican China, in its many guises, is seen as worthy of study in ways it was perhaps not in the 1970s or 1980s – even in socialist China.[6] Indeed, even for other, more senior, scholars who *do* remember Chiang's world, research is no longer necessarily fettered by the same political or scholarly concerns that dominated work some decades ago.

To what extent, however, does such a context make this new wave of history writing about Chiang Kai-shek actually *new*?[7] What is to be gained by revisiting Chiang in a "post Cold-War" or "post-Reform" light? Do the new sources change our views about Chiang's leadership or the periods in which he presided? And why is it necessary to revisit Chiang at all? Drawing extensively from the literatures of the People's Republic, Taiwan, and the Anglophone academies, the purpose of this essay is to attempt an initial response.[8]

TWENTIETH-CENTURY HISTORIOGRAPHY

In the People's Republic, the image of Chiang Kai-shek which held sway for many years was that which had been articulated in Chen Boda's work *Renmin Gongdi Jiang Jieshi* ("Chiang Kai-shek: Enemy of the People") – a book published originally during the Civil War by a devoted communist who had spent a number of years imprisoned by the KMT.[9] The image of Chiang which emerged from this and subsequent books was one borne of the life-and-death struggle between the Communists and the Nationalists. It contained little by way of subtlety, and portrayed 1927 – the year of Chiang's purge of the communists – as the major turning point in Chiang's career. Chiang was primarily someone who worked against the interests of the "Chinese people": a dictator who killed trade unionists, drowned peasants and served the interests of the United States, the Shanghai compradors and the landlords.

Chen Boda's assessment continued to influence official Communist perceptions of Chiang well into the post-1949 era, with Chiang's flight to Taiwan being used as further evidence of his acquiescence to American policy objectives. Chiang's efforts in fighting against the Japanese were rarely acknowledged, with much scholarship instead focusing on his efforts to negotiate his way out of the war.[10] Despite Mao's rise, Chiang's name was still commonly utilized in public discourse in the PRC, while events in Taiwan (such as the massacres of early 1947) also became central to the official PRC assessment – here was the "reactionary ruling clique of Chiang Kai-shek" oppressing the "heroic" Taiwanese people as they rose up against him.[11] From the Land Reform campaigns of

6 Wang 2008, pp. 89–97.

7 1949, for instance, continues to mark the critical year for many of the new books about Chiang which are being published in Chinese at the moment. For an example of PRC-published work of this nature, see Wang and Zhang 2007; for a Taiwan-published example, see Liu 2009.

8 Research from Japanese academies was unfortunately beyond the scope of this review. Although we cite Duan Ruicong, who is a scholar at Keiō University, the work we referenced for this review was published in a PRC journal (Duan 2009).

9 Chen 1948.

10 Coble 2007, pp. 396–97.

11 Lai 1991, p. 3.

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the early post-Liberation years through to the Cultural Revolution, the spectre of a resurgent Chiang was commonly raised in the PRC – giving credence, ironically, to the wildly ambitious claims that Chiang himself was voicing from Taipei about an imminent Nationalist retaking of the mainland. Indeed, Chiang was even present in the wording adopted by the PRC when it accepted the China seat at the United Nations in October 1971 from the "representatives of Chiang Kai-shek" who had "unlawfully occupied" that position in the years previous.[12]

Equally important to textual portrayals were the ways in which Chiang was literally painted by PRC-based artists. The slight figure and short stature of "Chiang Kai-shek the national criminal" (*Guozei Jiang Jieshi* 國賊蔣介石) – the individual who "brought calamities upon the nation" (*huoguo yangming* 禍國殃民) – were exacerbated by presenting him in an oversized military uniform. Chiang was depicted as a bandy-legged, large-headed but emaciated man (not unlike the image that had filled the pages of Japanese wartime propaganda in Asia two decades earlier); this sickly image often contrasted to the muscular strength of the Chinese masses. Like Americans (and other "imperialists"), Chiang was also commonly painted in "Wicked-Witch-of-the-West" green or a pallid grey in mainland propaganda art through the 1950s and 1960s. In both word and image, this was a decidedly two-dimensional Chiang.[13]

Despite the uniformity of such written and visual assessments, however, it is evident that certain aspects of Chiang's legacy on the mainland – even in spite of the iconoclasm of the Cultural Revolution – remained largely untouched (and perhaps even protected). Indeed, as early as 1982, PRC leaders were calling for the Chiang clan to consider burying Chiang's body in his hometown in Zhejiang Province, in a "newly refurbished Chiang family burial-ground".[14] As we shall see below, such provincial tolerance of, if not admiration for, the legacy of Chiang continues to have consequences for scholarship in the PRC today.

In Nationalist Taiwan, meanwhile, there was less agreement on how Chiang should be portrayed or assessed. This was partly because, prior to his death, Chiang did not qualify as a critical topic of academic study (even if any living scholar in Taiwan had dared to analyse the leader critically while he was still alive). On the one hand, this reflected an official line in Taipei which interpreted the Republic of China's history as being frozen in time at 1949, and Chiang's sojourn on Taiwan temporary.[15] Any final assessment of Chiang and his place in (post-1949) history would have to await his triumphant return to Nanjing. On the other, the material that would make for any Nationalist (re-) interpretation of Chiang possible was tightly controlled by the state that Chiang headed, with access limited to a small party elite.[16]

Nonetheless, authorized Nationalist biographies of Chiang did emerge from within that elite. Hollington K. Tong's 1938 book – published on numerous occasions up until 1957 –

12 UN Resolution.

13 Such images were particularly typical in books written for children. Examples include Xie 1962 and Li 1965.

14 Lary 1982, p. 473.

15 Taylor 2009b.

16 Huang 2010.

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marked probably the first attempt of this type, yet this also set something of a precedent for later elements of the official interpretation of Chiang within the Nationalist realm. Central to Tong's analysis was Chiang as a *personality*, a leader shaped by the topography of the "mountains and clear streams" in his native Xikou. Chiang's entire life story – despite Tong's narrative ending with the triumph of the Northern Expedition – was environmentally determined: here was a man who had been shaped by watching fish swim upstream (i.e., against adversity) as a child in rural Zhejiang, for instance, or in whose frugal habits one could find the makings of a great leader.[17] These same tropes would come to dominate the images of Chiang that were passed down to generations of schoolchildren in Taiwan.[18]

Core to much of this historiography was the word "destiny" (*mingyun* 命運). Chiang was "Asia's man of destiny" in the eyes of hagiographer H. H. Chang, for instance;[19] Taiwan under Chiang was, for the Anglophone world's most prolific Cold-War supporter of the KMT, W. G. Goddard, an "island of destiny";[20] and Chiang presented himself as holding the key to understanding *China's Destiny* as early as 1947.[21] A central element in all such writing was the sense that Chiang was ordained, thanks to the time and place of his birth – or perhaps even his ancestry – to lead China to some ultimate victory.

As this last example suggests, however, Chiang also publicly assessed *himself* in this period, as scholars such as Liu Wei-kai have recently shown through examination of Chiang's "*mea culpa*"-themed speeches in the early 1950s,[22] and as evidenced in the work that was penned in Chiang's name on Taiwan – *Soviet Russia in China* perhaps being the best-known example – which was based on a desire to explain publicly just how the mainland had been "lost".[23]

However, hagiographies of Chiang published on Taiwan peaked not during Chiang's lifetime, but shortly after his death – at a time when the Nationalist government, led by Chiang's son, Chiang Ching-kuo, was seeking to underline its legitimacy in the eyes of both the wider world and the populace over which it reigned. Indeed, it was in the aftermath of this period that one of the most infamous instances of quasi-academic Chiang hagiography was published in English – Chen Che-san's apologia for Chiang and his celebration of the late president's "standing in the eyes of the people in Taiwan".[24] The late 1970s and early 1980s not only led to the generation of textual or academic assessments such as these, however. The main institution which until very recently was tasked with telling the official Chiang Kai-shek story on Taiwan – the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall – was built only in this time, and was designed to honour Chiang's memory. In such posthumous evaluations, coming as they did at a time when the Nationalist regime

17 Tong 1938.

18 On such stories, see Taylor 2006, pp. 106–07.

19 Chang 1944.

20 Gao (Goddard) 1960.

21 Chiang 1947.

22 Liu 2008.

23 Chiang 1957.

24 Chen 1986.

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was largely isolated from the world and the Cold War was still a reality, anti-communism was presented as one of Chiang's defining beliefs, and was ranked over and above his efforts during the war against the Japanese.

Even in martial-law-era Taiwan, however, dissident assessments of Chiang were produced, often being compiled at great personal expense to their authors. Indeed, in the case of the writer Boyang, criticism of Chiang in the form of a supposedly allegorical cartoon resulted in long-term imprisonment.[25] Most representative of such work, however, was the "counter hagiography" of dissident intellectuals such as Li Ao.[26] Chiang also became a central figure in pro-nativist histories written in exile by Taiwanese intellectuals, many of which were structured around the events of early 1947.[27] Written in the context of a Taiwan in which criticism of Chiang was tantamount to treason, and in which "Chiang-adoration" was used as a means for ambitious bureaucrats to advance their careers, these overtly political and often highly emotional assessments, many of which aimed at countering official Nationalist doctrine, also laid the foundation for later attempts to erase Chiang from public debate altogether in early twenty-first century Taiwan.

CHIANG AND THE "LOSS OF CHINA"

There were certain commonalities between official PRC interpretations of Chiang and academic evaluations emerging in the Western academy during the 1950s and 1960s. One general assessment in this period, for instance, was that Chiang had been a "reactionary". Historians such as Harold Isaacs and Mary C. Wright observed that Chiang's purges of 1927 marked the moment at which a potentially progressive revolution under the KMT had reverted to a conservative and fundamentally anti-revolutionary dictatorship led by an old-fashioned autocrat.[28] This vein of scholarship continued to influence the work of later historians: "By his actions in Shanghai [in 1927]," wrote John Fitzgerald in as late as 1989, for example, "Chiang quashed the hopes not of socialist revolution but of the national revolution."[29]

Another blanket assessment that emerged in Western historiography in this era was that Chiang was a "traditionalist". Like the "reactionary" label, this reading suggested that Chiang had been ill-equipped to usher China into the modern era. In echoing the old dynastic cycles of the past (like Yuan Shikai before him), Chiang, according to John Fairbank, had strengths in the traditional qualifications of "courage and determination to retain power, ethical fervour and austerity that gave him personal prestige, loyalty to those who were loyal to him, ruthlessness and subtlety in balancing his rivals against one another." Yet in possessing these characteristics, Chiang was nevertheless, a "prisoner of the past" who failed to perform his historical role as the dynastic founder.[30] Others, like

25 Lancashire 1982, pp. 663–86.

26 Li 1986.

27 Rawnsley and Rawnsley 2001, pp. 77–106.

28 Isaacs 1938; Wright 1955.

29 Fitzgerald 1989, p. 38.

30 This interpretation, based on Fairbank 1976, is forwarded by Alitto 1986, pp. 730–31.

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Wright, argued that Chiang had a more opportunistic understanding of tradition. Writing at a time when "Confucianism" was still *déclassé*, such histories presented Chiang as a leader who had selectively applied elements of Confucianism "on an *ad hoc* basis" to suit his will, but whose application of such ideals did not deserve any "systematic analysis".[31]

The focus on Chiang in much of the scholarly literature emanating from the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, however, moved in an increasingly different direction, focusing primarily on the war and immediate post-war years – albeit with an equally dismissive bent. Pichon Loh wrote extensively on Chiang's failings and successes, ascribing Chiang's ultimate "loss" of the mainland to his lack of versatility and his inability to grasp the realities of changes that were going on around him (rather than, say, his opportunism). For Loh, Chiang was a man who "allowed history to march past him".[32]

Arguably most representative of this approach, however, was the work of Lloyd Eastman. Eastman's view of Chiang emerged not out of biography (or out of an assessment decided upon during the Civil War), but out of a broad study of the Nationalist state that Chiang had led on the mainland. Hence, the questions that interested Eastman about Chiang were not dissimilar to those which had concerned Chiang's sympathizers on the Right a decade earlier – how had this man "lost" China?[33] Eastman attempted to answer such questions with reference to Chiang's style of leadership. The Chiang Kai-shek who emerged from the pages of Eastman's *Abortive Revolution* was one inspired by fascism, whose person embodied all authority wherever he travelled, but who also was ultimately out of step with the times. "Chiang was undoubtedly a remarkable man," argued Eastman. But such remarkableness was qualified: "His talents . . . were best suited to the old China. In the game of warlord politics, he was a master. But China was in the process of change, and the rules of the game of politics were changing accordingly."[34]

Eastman was, of course, writing against the "pro-Chiang" line that had dominated public opinion in the United States in the 1950s, which had been propagated through the pages of *Time-Life* magazine and other sections of Henry Luce's media empire, and which has been documented in the substantial literature on the China Lobby. But what set assessments such as Eastman's apart from both earlier American readings and from those in the official historiography of the mainland was that Chiang was presented as a spent force. Little interest was shown in Chiang's life on Taiwan in the scholarship emerging at this time, for instance.[35] Indeed, in the years before anything resembling "Taiwan history" was taken seriously, the Chiang that appeared in the pages of English-language scholarship was firmly set on the mainland – either in the Nanjing decade, in the war against the Japanese, or in the years immediately leading up to the "Kuomintang debacle of 1949".[36] Chiang ultimately emerged as a tragic figure – one to pity rather than fear.

31 Wright 1955, p. 523.

32 Loh 1966, p. 451.

33 Indeed, the same trope has been used in two major biographies of Chiang since that time: Crozier 1976 and Fenby 2003.

34 Eastman 1974, pp. 281–82.

35 There were exceptions: one example is the damning collection edited by Mancall 1964; at the other end of the spectrum was the hagiography of Goddard 1962.

36 In the title of the 1965 book edited by Pichon Loh and published through D. C. Heath and Company.

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Although a more nuanced picture of Chiang emerged as the year 1949 receded into history, the conclusions drawn were nevertheless very similar, and the focus on Chiang's pre-1949 failures were still dominant by the early 1990s. Parks Coble has noted that the Japanese had exerted a complex influence on Chiang in the 1930s: on the one hand, they helped to strengthen his leadership as others who attempted to usurp his power were considered petty; on the other, because of Chiang's policy of "first internal pacification, then external resistance", he was powerless to use Japanese aggression to his advantage. In having to suppress anti-Japanese sentiments, he was unable to use protesters to strengthen his own government.[37] Similar interpretations were evident in Arif Dirlik's study of the New Life Movement, launched by Chiang in 1934. Dirlik argued that Chiang recognized that popular support was an important component of the "new" nation; however, he also wanted to control that popular support. Again, the need to suppress expressions of hostility against Japan made it so that, in the end, the movement really had nothing to offer the people for their support, beyond an appeal to improve hygiene and cleanliness. Consequently, although Chiang recognized the importance of popular support, his actions adhered to traditional methods of indoctrination.[38]

CHIANG'S RETURN TO CHINA

As anyone involved in the study of Chinese history and historiography will be aware, many of these assessments of Chiang persist in both public and academic discourse to some degree. Eastman's assessment, in particular, still features highly on university reading lists – testament, perhaps, to the enduring quality of Eastman's scholarship – and continues to be accepted unquestioningly by some. Chiang is still commonly and vehemently denounced as an "enemy of the people" by many in the People's Republic. And traces of the official hagiographies of Chiang can also still be found in institutions built on Taiwan in his posthumous honour.

Yet the ranks of these "older Chiangs" have been joined in recent years by new assessments which both undermine *and* reinforce earlier portrayals. In Taiwan, for example, after a period (in the 1990s) during which Chiang's legacy was barely even mentioned, public debates for and against the merits of Chiang's reign over the island were prevalent in the early 2000s. Indeed, Chiang returned to centre stage under the rule of the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party, with government attempts to open sites associated with Chiang's life on Taiwan to public access, and to remove the visual and toponymic references to Chiang which had been carved into the landscape under KMT rule, all being referred to as a program of "*quJianghua* 去蔣化", or "de-Chiang Kai-shek-ification".[39] This trend in and of itself led to new writing on the Chiang legacy in Taiwan, although most scholars in Taiwan remained firmly focused on Chiang in his pre-1949 incarnation.[40] With the exception of research by scholars such as Chang

37 Coble 1991, pp. 378–79.

38 Dirlik 1975, p. 979; Fitzgerald 1996, p. 37.

39 Taylor 2010.

40 With assessments of Chiang's post-1949 life becoming the realm of nativist intellectuals and inheritors of the Li Ao (Lee Ao) "counter hagiography" tradition, such as Jim Lee (Li Xiaofeng).

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Su-ya,[41] Chiang has been conspicuous in his absence from the emerging field of "Taiwan history" (*Taiwanshi*) over the last two decades[42] – and it has been left, ironically, to mainland Chinese and American scholars to address this period of his political career.[43]

It is changes to the image of Chiang on the mainland, however, which have been most widely commented upon. There, the "official" – though never officially accepted as such – portrayal of Chiang has been vigorously rewritten over the last decade or more. Much of the current reassessment of Chiang has emerged out of something that Rana Mitter has described as a "new historiography" of the War of Resistance, and a new willingness on the part of the CCP to acknowledge the Nationalist contribution to the fight against Japan (perhaps as a means of finding common ground with the KMT, or perhaps because of the similarities between Chiang's patriotic yet authoritarian style of leadership, which is currently favoured in Beijing).[44] Yet in more recent years, this new public assessment of Chiang has expanded. Indeed, it is significant that just as the Civil War inspired Chen Boda's influential picture of Chiang as an "enemy of the people" in the 1940s, the same period has recently become the setting for the emergence of a new, PRC-friendly Chiang – one who is even granted a place in the story of the Founding of a [People's] Republic (*Jianguo Daye* 建国大业). In the 2009 film about the Chinese Civil War which goes under this very title, Chiang is portrayed – as Gloria and M. E. Davies phrase it – as a "valiant, principled and sincere" individual, and a true patriot who "simply chose the wrong path".[45]

As the historian Yang Tianshi puts it, such depictions are representative of a broader tendency in the PRC to transform Chiang's image from that of a "devil" (*gui*) – as he was in Chen Boda's era – to that of a "deity" (*shen*) today.[46] The significance of such reassessments is substantial, and goes far beyond the official interpretation of Chiang himself. Indeed, Chiang's reinstatement as a patriotic hero in the PRC's own history – even at a time when he was killing communists – suggests that many of the same themes and elements which once defined the CCP's self-perceptions (such as class), are now obsolete. While mainland Chinese scholarship has certainly not ignored Chiang's professed hatred of communism, it has often tended to move beyond this question, or to think critically about the relationship that Chiang maintained with his nominal rivals on the Left. New scholarship has stressed Chiang's professed admiration for communist mobilizational powers and the Leninist hierarchies it encouraged. More importantly, it has moved the focus onto points of consensus between Chiang and his enemies in the CCP: their shared dislike of (particularly British) imperialism, their common commitment to something called "revolution", their parallel introduction of Land Reform and other campaigns,

41 Chang 2011.

42 The lack of any significant representation from the Taiwan studies field at a conference on Chiang organized by Huang Tzu-chin at the Institute of Modern History at Academia Sinica in September 2010, and attended by one of the authors (Taylor), was the subject of much coffee-break discussion at the event in question.

43 See, for instance, Chen 2010 and Myers 2009.

44 Mitter 2000, pp. 279–93; Mitter 2010, pp. 85–95.

45 Davies and Davies 2009.

46 Yang 2006.

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and their professed belief in the need for a strong, modern China built on an "economistic" model of development.[47]

There can be little doubt that such scholarship represents the context in which it is emerging. It could hardly be coincidence, for example, that attempts to re-examine Chiang's credentials as a "unifier" of his country – a firm believer in what the Chinese government now refers to as the principle of "One China" – is deemed a respectable academic line of enquiry in a post-1997, "One-Country-Two-Systems" world. Indeed, as W. J. F. Jenner noted some years ago, Chiang's language of ethnic nationalism has become the template for a communist party that has long jettisoned the rhetoric of Mao Zedong Thought.[48]

None of this is denied in the writing of mainland scholars themselves. Even Yang Tianshi has justified some of his work on the basis of the current political mood in the PRC – something that Taiwan-based reviewers of Yang's work have subtly hinted is not completely "... free from the thick fog of political obfuscation".[49] Yang has prefaced the second volume of his diary-based collection of essays with statements clearly informed by the current cross-Strait relationship:

> In his early years, he [Chiang] followed Sun Yat-sen's revolution, then cooperated on two occasions with the Communist Party ... in his latter years, after moving to Taiwan, he opposed Taiwan independence, upheld [the idea of] "One China," and developed Taiwan. Overall, he achieved a certain number of good things.[50]

Similarly – and as part of Yang's statement suggests – while the differences between the CCP under Mao and the KMT under Chiang were once stressed, similarities and cooperation between the two have emerged as legitimate subjects of debate not only in the PRC, but also in Taiwan and in new assessments of Chiang emerging in the Anglophone academy, such as Jay Taylor's *Generalissimo*. That such attempts have arisen precisely as the KMT and CCP are undertaking party-to-party talks on the cross-Strait relationship, and "KMT heavyweights, both past and present, trek to the mainland seriatim", is surely significant.[51]

RECLAIMING CHIANG

While shifting scholarly and political sands in the PRC, Taiwan and global academia have influenced the way in which Chiang is now thought about, unprecedented access to historical sources has also led to new questions over who "owns" Chiang. Indicative of such wider questions is the debate surrounding the decision of the Chiang estate to deposit the diaries at the Hoover Institution in 2004. Prior to this date, materials relating to the

47 Yeh 2007, pp. 205–06.

48 Jenner 2001.

49 Chen 2009, p. 94.

50 Yang 2010, p. xii.

51 Gold 2010, p. 69.

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study of Chiang had been largely concentrated in public institutions on the island to which Chiang had fled in 1949. Taiwan's Academia Historica had been tasked with preserving, collating and granting access to papers relating to Chiang's period as Nationalist president; the KMT's own party archives in Taipei held a substantial number of files relating to Chiang in one form or another (with these being increasingly opened to scholarly scrutiny over the course of the 2000s); and Taiwanese institutions, such as Academia Sinica, became home to academics who built entire careers on the study of Chiang. It was thus to Taiwan that foreign and mainland scholars interested in interrogating the written record relating to Chiang travelled.

This all changed with the deposition of the diaries at Hoover – an event which was met with disappointment on the part of some Taiwanese intellectuals, and even protests from a number of Chiang's erstwhile critics on the island (a number of whom saw in the diaries a means of tracing the extent of Chiang's complicity in the events of early 1947). The opening of the diaries at Hoover was the single most important catalyst for new scholarship on Chiang on both sides of the Strait, and led to the production of numerous new works in Chinese and English – Yang Tianshi's work perhaps most representative of the former, and Jay Taylor's biography of the latter. Coming as it did in the midst of what Suzanne Pepper has referred to as the "new archive-based empiricism now ascendant" in the study of modern Chinese history,[52] access to this source contributed to an almost obsessive search for definitive resolution to various debates surrounding Chiang and his motives at different points throughout the twentieth century. Yet the mere importance of the hitherto unseen diaries was only part of this process; that Chiang's own Republican state in Taipei could no longer claim a monopoly over Chiang studies was equally crucial and has resulted in contestation of ownership. Researchers at Academia Sinica's Institute of Modern History, for example, would like to see the diaries published. While family member, Elizabeth Chiang, the widow of Chiang Ching-kuo's third son and the person who lent the diaries to Hoover in 2004, is amenable to the diaries' publication, other members of the Chiang family (namely, Chiang Youmei) have expressed vigorous dissent.[53] Because negotiations with the Chiang family have yet to yield definitive fruit, there is still uncertainty as to whether Taiwan might even begin to publish the diaries in some form soon.[54] Interestingly, the opening of Chiang Ching-kuo's diaries to the public hinges upon the resolution of this issue.[55]

Controversy also surrounds access to the diaries. Currently, scholars must spend weeks, months, and for some, even more than a year, perusing the diaries at the Hoover Institution. Because the archive currently prohibits the photocopying of materials, researchers have to spend each day copying copious amounts of information from the diaries by hand – researchers are even prohibited from typing excerpts or notes – with one day's work likely to equate to only several minutes of photocopying.[56]

52 Pepper 2004, p. 120.

53 Lisa Nguyen shared these thoughts with one of the authors (Huang) in email correspondence, 13 July 2011.

54 Huang Ko-wu relayed these plans to one of the authors (Huang) at the December 2010 conference in Taipei.

55 Lisa Nguyen, email correspondence, 13 July 2011.

56 Observation made at a panel discussion on the diaries at the 2010 conference in Taipei.

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Ironically, access to the handwritten diaries has also exposed the difficulties that many non-Chinese historians face when working with such sources. With the exception of Jay Taylor's biography and the work of scholars who habitually publish in both English and Chinese (Steve Tsang, for example), the Anglophone academy has been largely underrepresented in much of the diary-inspired scholarship. Since most researchers who have made the "pilgrimage" to the archives have been scholars with fluent or near-fluent reading ability in Chinese, scholars based at Hoover, such as Hsiao-ting Lin, are endeavouring to encourage greater levels of Western scholarly interest in the diaries by facilitating visits by non-Chinese scholars to Stanford. As yet, however, Chiang's notoriously difficult to decipher handwriting makes such work challenging.

Two final challenges face any researcher who wishes to examine the diaries. The first relates to the physical state of the documents themselves, which arrived at the Hoover Institution displaying mould growth, as well as water and pest damage. Portions of the diaries are thus illegible, have missing pages, or have pages stuck together. Because of the fragile condition of the diaries, researchers are provided with paper printouts made from high-quality 35 mm microfilm; however, these "use copies" are obviously unable to recover the missing or illegible texts.[57] The second challenge relates to the issue of redactions. There are earlier redactions made by Chiang Kai-shek, Chiang Ching-kuo, or perhaps a personal secretary. In addition, the Chiang family perused the contents of the diaries before their opening to the public and has chosen to keep certain passages private until 2035.[58] These ellipses in the diary, whether by nature or design, are bound to frustrate researchers seeking the complete story.

Regardless of the practical difficulties involved in accessing the Chiang diaries, however, it is clear that something much larger is at stake in such debates. As the figure of Chiang is rehabilitated in the PRC and his contributions to China are written back into the official historical narrative on the mainland, the ownership that the Republican Chinese state on Taiwan could once claim over interpretation of Chiang and his legacy appears to have been lost. At the same time, Western historiography is seemingly being "left behind", as predominantly Chinese scholars set the tone for Chiang's scholarly reassessment. Indeed, while the study of the diary as a genre is popular in scholarship pursued in the Anglophone academy at present,[59] biography remains a far sparser field when it comes to English-language publications in Chinese history, or for that matter, in general history. This comes as no surprise as Anglophone historians and political scientists have avoided the biographical form because of an aversion to the idea that "individuals, and individual motivation, could tilt the course of events".[60] One might note that the authors of the two major recent English-language biographies about Chiang are actually situated outside of academia,[61] and the mass availability of their works in popular bookstores

57 See "Custodial History" at http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt438nc7np

58 See "Scope and Content of Collections" at http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt438nc7np. During a panel discussion at the December 2010 conference in Taipei, Shirley Soong mentioned that the reason for the current redactions was to protect the privacy of individuals or family members still living.

59 See, for instance, Moore 2008.

60 Pimlott 1999.

61 Fenby 2003; Taylor 2009a.

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seems to underscore a point of view that political biography is "market and media driven" and is a genre of writing that "claims too much, on the basis of too little".[62]

Although the Anglophone academy's reflections on the question of a leader's agency has long ago moved away from the "great leader" approach, at times taking a more linguistic or cultural "turn", the way forward, while still unclear, nevertheless holds some promising developments. A heated debate in the 1980s and 1990s centred on just this question of what role individuals played in "making" revolution, resulting in new approaches to thinking about the agency of individuals, structures, and their interactions.[63] Although this line of research has yielded promising theoretical developments, it has not been fully utilized in thinking about political leaders in particular. Hence, while biographical, diary-based studies of Chiang remain an important vehicle for reinterpreting Chiang in China, one will likely see a different form of reinterpretation following elsewhere.[64]

There are other voices in this debate, too. The rediscovery of Chiang in the PRC has become manifest not just in the corridors of academic power in Beijing, but also in Chiang's native Zhejiang, where scholarship on Chiang as one of that province's few national leaders has been encouraged and funded through locally based universities and provincial archives. Ironically, some of this new "local" Chiang Kai-shek scholarship – finding its clearest articulation in the work produced by Chen Hongmin and others at Zheijiang University's Centre for Chiang Kai-shek and Modern Chinese History – appears to be following in the tradition that Hollington Tong set in the 1930s of writing about Chiang in what might be termed a "provincially determined" way. Similar trends are noticeable in the Zhejiang Provincial Archives, where efforts have been made to publicize holdings associated with Chiang and those around him.[65] Indeed, some Chinese scholars – publishing in Shanghai-based journals – have even gone as far as to examine Chiang's own perceptions of Zhejiang and his place therein.[66] In other words, just as the wider PRC academy is reclaiming Chiang's historiography from the North American and Taiwanese academies, Zhejiang is at least vying for a voice – albeit a consciously "provincial" one.

Despite these controversies, the spate of international conferences that have resulted from the opening of the diaries has suggested new ways of "co-claiming" Chiang. The December 2010 conference in Taipei spawned a discussion concerning the missing diaries for the year 1924, for example. As all the main archivists were present in one room, the issue was more readily brought to resolution: Ma Zhendu vouched that there was no such copy at the Number Two Archive in Nanjing; Liu Wei-kai vouched the same for Taiwan, and Shirley Soong vouched the same for Hoover, making the specific point that every page of the existent diary passed through her hands, and countering insinuations that Hoover has kept a copy in secret. Discussions such as these encourage opportunities for the Chinese, Taiwanese, Japanese and Anglophone academies to overcome their

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62 Pimlott (1999) quoting Patrick O'Brien, former Director of the Institute of Historical Research, UK.

63 See, for instance, Sewell 1994.

64 One of the authors (Huang), in fact, is attempting to depict more faithfully the agency of leaders using Chiang Kai-shek as a case study, drawing from excerpts of the diary in the *shilüe* manuscripts.

65 http://www.zjda.gov.cn/archive/platformData/infoplat/pub/archivese_52/gcjs_2407/

66 Yuan 2011.

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particular confines and reach general conclusions – and for "ownership" of this new historiography to be left deliberately ambiguous.[67]

NEW SOURCES – AND THEIR LIMITS

Setting aside questions of ownership, it is clear that the opening of the diaries has helped to shed new light on Chiang's life, dispelling certain assumptions about him and providing more emotional linkages between Chiang and the environment in which he worked. Whereas some early commentators had presented Chiang's conversion to Christianity as a "career move", for instance, Jay Taylor notes that Chiang read the Bible seriously and often quoted from it in his diary, suggesting a sincerity in his commitment to Methodism.[68] Dispelling another rumour that Chiang had engaged in extra-marital affairs during his marriage with Soong May-ling, the diary-informed scholarship of Yang Tianshi argues that their marriage was, in fact, one that fulfilled Christian marital obligations.[69]

In the process of deciphering the diaries, one finds that they provide an interesting window into the changing context of Chinese historiography and self-representation. Just as dynastic emperors of the past had a "Diary of Activity and Repose" (*qijuzhu* 起居注) that would figure prominently into the Standard Histories (a chronicle of the imperial dynastic reign), Chiang's diaries were meant to figure centrally in a version of the "Standard History" for posterity's evaluation of his leadership and regime. One difference was that imperial recorders were responsible for compiling the emperors' diary, and even more importantly, the emperor was prohibited from reading the diary during his reign.[70] That Chiang was penning his own diary spoke to the change from the relationship between emperor and subject to that between national leader and citizen, and hence, a desire to arouse the empathy of the future reader.[71]

Yet the diaries have also raised as many questions as they have answers, both about Chiang himself and about the potential historiographical pitfalls inherent in making use of such sources. As Keith Schoppa notes of this source, for instance, "diary omissions . . ." – the purging of communists in the late 1920s, the breaking of the Yellow River dykes in 1938 and the massacres of early 1947 in Taiwan – ". . . are perhaps more revealing than diary inclusions."[72] Just because certain events were not mentioned in the diaries does

67 The whereabouts of the 1924 diaries still remain a mystery. Liu Weikai, in email correspondence to one of the authors (Huang), 16 July 2011, notes that although Chiang's 28 November 1951 diary entry states that "the 1924 diaries were stolen by the Communists" (Chiang 1951), this explanation is dissatisfying because the diary has yet to show up in any PRC archive. Liu also notes that the only person who has purportedly seen the diary was Luo Jialun: on 30 June 1931, Ma Xingwei recorded Luo as saying that he had viewed the 1924 diary because Chiang had wanted to bring it out for publication (Luo and Luo 2009, p. 25). Lisa Nguyen further observes that Chiang's personal secretary Mao Sicheng likely had no access to the 1924 diaries, as they are not referenced in his *Mr. Jiang Jieshi and His Years before 1926* (Mao 1965). Perhaps when Chiang Ching-kuo's diaries are released, further information might be gleaned as to whether Ching-kuo had perused his father's diaries (email correspondence, 13 July 2011).

68 Taylor 2009a, pp. 91–92.

69 Yang 2010, pp. 502–04.

70 Franke 1965; Yang 1965.

71 Huang 2010.

72 Schoppa 2010, p. 31.

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not mean that they did not occur, or were of some lesser relevance than historians have hitherto ascribed to them. The absence of what would otherwise be considered "history-making" events in Chiang's diaries raises all kinds of questions about agency, and highlights the importance of reading these texts critically.

There are other noticeable trends in this diary-informed research. In focusing on primary sources to such a degree – in response, perhaps, to the general lack of such sources available to mainland-based scholars in earlier periods – much of the new scholarship has tended to neglect earlier publications, which may (or may not) provide a wider contextual background to new empirical findings. One sees such tendencies not only in the collections of essays based on the diaries published by the leading mainland scholar in the field, Yang Tianshi,[73] but also in more specific output, such as recent studies of Chiang Kai-shek's reading habits as evidenced in the diaries.[74] None of this necessarily undermines the value of this new work; it does, however, suggest a very noticeable shift away from broader questions towards highly specialized ones.

Another unintended consequence of this "democratization" of materials is that most of these "raw" materials were never meant for public consumption. Hence, there is an element of truth in Yang Tianshi's observation that Chiang wrote the diaries mainly for himself. Chiang cursed often and provided confessional materials, giving himself demerits for looking lustily after women, for example.[75] He likely would have avoided penning down these thoughts if he had in mind that the public would have direct access. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that Chiang had no eye to future publication. The assumption was that his diaries would undergo "revision" as they clearly did in the 1940s by Chiang's secretaries in Chongqing. In obtaining the uncensored version, one is presumably able to trace the process by which Chiang and his coterie sought to construct his public face for posterity.

There are other questions, too. New access to such sources has led to the establishment of something that can only be referred to as a "Chiang Kai-shek industry" – and that some mainland scholars have referred to as "Chiang Kai-shek studies fever"[76] – with the publication of new scholarly and quasi-scholarly books on Chiang, but also the canny re-publication of earlier scholarship to make maximum effect out of the news surrounding the diaries. It was possibly more than coincidence, for example, that in 2009 the *China Times* Group decided to republish Ray Huang's 1994 book based on what was then only a partially available set of Chiang Kai-shek's diaries, despite the author having died prior to the complete diaries being made public. This "industry", however, has extended even to what the Taiwanese historian Lin May-li has referred to as "pop art Chiang Kai-shek" (*pupu Jiang Jieshi* 普普蔣介石),[77] ranging from exhibitions of artefacts relating to Chiang, to the creation of quirky Chiang-related design products by Taipei-based companies and the construction of high-end residential property near or on sites formerly associated with Chiang. Much of this has coincided with rising numbers of mainland

73 Yang 2010.

74 Wang 2009.

75 Lawson 2007.

76 Jiang 2010, pp. 8–9.

77 Lin 2009a.

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tourists visiting Taiwan since 2008.[78] Even in all of this, however, one cannot help feeling that older assessments of other Chinese leaders are still at work. The parallels and similarities between the Chiang industry of the 2000s and the "Mao fever" which swept the mainland in earlier years suggest, in themselves, that tacit comparisons with Mao continue to inform many "new" interpretations of Chiang.

NEW ASSESSMENTS

Nonetheless, the scholarly excitement that has followed the diaries has led to some interesting new strands of scholarship. One thread that is now emerging, for instance, is the importance of that often overlooked power which shaped everything from Chiang's views on imperialism to his diplomatic foray to India in 1941–1942 – the British Empire. With much work in the past focusing on Chiang's ambivalent relationship with the United States, his fight (or otherwise) against the Japanese and his often contradictory views of the Soviets, it is easy to forget that the Asia into which Chiang was born was one still dominated by the British imperial presence. Recent scholarship points to the importance of British India in Chiang's strategic considerations in Western China, for example.[79] But it is only in deconstructing the ravings against British rule which appeared daily in Chiang's diaries for many years, and in Chiang's interest in sections of China *irredenta* which fell within the bounds of the Raj, that this context comes into clearer relief.[80]

A second line of enquiry that is emerging debunks the lingering counterfactual that, had Chiang won the war, things would have been very different on the mainland. Building on the "substantial continuities in the pre- and post-1949 period" that scholars such as Julia Strauss and Morris Bian have identified,[81] recent work has revealed the extent to which Chiang's thinking and policies were strikingly similar to that of Mao's. For instance, something that was always rhetorically present in the KMT praise of Chiang but rarely focused upon was the concept of "revolution". While the very idea of Chiang Kai-shek as a "revolutionary" had long been dismissed by scholars working in the Wright/Isaacs or officially-ordained PRC tradition, access to new sources has reminded us that Chiang clearly "bought into" this idea, envisaging himself as a revolutionary and believing in the need for a revolution in China itself. While further research will be needed before we understand what Chiang actually meant by the term "*geming* 革命", the very ubiquity of this concept in his diaries and elsewhere suggests there is an urgent need to write Chiang back into a broader history of "revolution" in China.

Another point of similarity between Mao and Chiang was idealism. Like Mao, Chiang believed that just as long as the people had the will to do so, they would be able to surmount any material odds. Chiang had wanted soldiers to strip away bad habits and act with "benevolence" (*ren* 仁) and believed that soldiers could be re-made within six short months. Was this kind of idealism so different from Mao's efforts to leap over the normal

78 Taylor 2009b.

79 Such as Chiang's strategic concerns in Western China and Central Asia during the Second World War: Lin 2009b, pp. 201–17.

80 Works that address this topic include Duan 2009 and Tsang 2005.

81 Strauss 1997, pp. 330–31; Bian 2005.

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stages of economic development by relying on the extraordinary efforts of an entire society to implement the Great Leap Forward?[82]

And to put this counterfactual to rest, the question of whether China's economic miracle might have started earlier had Chiang remained leader on the mainland clearly seems to be in the negative. In Parks Coble's understanding, the economy (and especially the financial sector) was one of the most open before Chiang came to power in 1928. After the introduction of the *fabi* 法幣 in 1935, however, Chiang increased his ability to control the economy and effectively made things worse. Here, in fact, Chiang in the Nanjing era bears much in common with the current government's tight control over business coupled with crony capitalism.[83] Ironically, as Yasheng Huang notes, these very factors are contributing to the dysfunctions in China's current economic development.[84]

A final thread that seems to be emerging is of a different nature; it is related to how cross-Strait relations might be politically re-conceptualized. After all, Chiang had spent roughly equal amounts of time ruling on the mainland and Taiwan, and thus deeply influenced the political character of "both Chinas". That PRC- and Taiwan-based scholars can now compare their different views of Chiang and laugh together over the mystery of missing diaries not only suggests how times have changed, but also how the leader who diligently upheld the cross-Strait divide is now a focal point for potential bridges between the two sides. It is no small coincidence that Taiwan's president, Ma Ying-jeou, made an appearance at the December 2010 conference held at Taipei's symbolic Grand Hotel (a site long associated with the Chiang family). In Ma's speech to the conference, he described Chiang's experiments in allowing Hualien, a sparsely populated county in eastern Taiwan, to hold county elections in October 1950.[85] What is of note, however, was Ma's connecting of Chiang to democracy. The *Lianhebao* (*United Daily News*) featured a photograph of Ma the following day with a backdrop of an energetic Chiang located prominently above him, suggesting the connection of Ma as a democratically elected president arising from Chiang's KMT. The newspaper also highlighted the Hualien portion of Ma's speech, suggesting a clear line between Chiang, democracy, the current KMT, and Taiwan.[86] Chiang, it would seem, can now be made to fit any number of political agendas.

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

New access to scholarly materials and shifting socio-political trends has re-ignited older debates and encouraged new ones. Yet that same access has also laid bare the difficulties that parallel academies face when studying a figure such as Chiang Kai-shek. Scholars from the PRC, Taiwanese, Anglophone and Japanese academies may share an interest in Chiang, but the challenges to a stronger dialogue across and between these academies

82 Schoppa 2009.

83 Coble 2009.

84 Huang 2008.

85 This remote place had apparently been chosen because, had the experiment failed, it would have made less of an impact than had it failed in Taipei.

86 *Lianhebao* 2010, p. A6.

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remain substantial, and range from language to starkly different scholarly traditions. Evidence of this can be found within this very article. Readers will notice, for example, a general absence of reference within these lines to Japanese scholarship on Chiang – something that the authors hope may be remedied by future forays into this debate.

Much of the scholarship outlined above has no doubt been inspired directly by the opening of the diaries. It is also important to recall, however, that the "democratization" of materials on and about Chiang goes back further than 2004, and includes an increasing ease of access to other documents, such as his family documents as well as his personal books with detailed notes and markings, found in the "President Jiang Zhongzheng Archives", opened to the public in 1997 and located at Academia Historica in Taiwan. This trove of materials also contains the *shilüe* manuscripts (1927–1949), which is both a chronological and biographical compilation of Chiang's speeches, telegrams, reports, and diary excerpts put together by his secretaries in Chongqing during the 1940s (currently, the years from 1927–1945 are already in print).[87] Other collections include the Presidential Office files in Taipei, the KMT Party Archives, and Republican-era files held in mainland institutions, especially the Nanjing Number Two Archive.

While the diaries are no doubt important, their opening appears to have distracted scholars from the vast amounts of already accessible material that still sits in these other archives around the world. Indeed, it remains the case that entire bodies of sources have gone largely untouched – even despite initiatives such as the Visualising China Project at Bristol University, for example, historians have been slow to make use of the increasing ease with which visual sources relating to Chiang can be accessed.[88]

There are also numerous angles which have yet to be explored. Just as some Chinese scholars are now attempting to write "local" or "provincial" histories of Chiang, it may be up to scholars from outside the dominant Anglophone, Chinese, or Japanese academies to explore the possibilities of attempting more regionally-inspired histories of Chiang. We have yet to see, for instance, studies of Chiang which fit him not purely into narratives of modern Chinese history, but also into a regional, early Cold War story of anti-communist "strongmen", from Ngo Dinh Diem in Vietnam to Syngman Rhee in Korea. At present, however, the dominant comparison continues to be Mao, this being one line of enquiry that no amount of above-mentioned "generational shift" seems to be able to challenge.

It is our small hope that this review might go some way in inspiring historians to think about the many more directions in which the exciting new scholarship on Chiang Kai-shek might be taken, but also to consider the implications of such scholarship in its wider socio-political context.

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87 *Shilüe Gaoben* (2003–2011).

88 Bickers 2007.

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