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# The Flying Tigers: Transnational Memories of a World War II Collaboration

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Spring 2018

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## Introduction

Between 2011 and 2015, organizations from China, Hong Kong, and the United States, co-produced a traveling exhibit entitled, *National Memories: U.S.-China Collaboration During WWII*. *National Memories*, which was exhibited in various cities across China, Taiwan, and the U.S., helped revive the memory of the Flying Tigers, a group of volunteer U.S. fighter pilots and crewmen who went to China in 1941 to aid the Chinese Nationalist military in resisting Japanese aggression. The exhibit featured photos from the United States National Archives taken by the 164th U.S. Signal Photo Company during the war. Themes and subjects of the photos included Lieutenant General Claire Lee Chennault, who was the leader of the group; the P-40 Tomahawk planes that were used in the operation; the American members of the Flying Tigers; and the Chinese locals who assisted the operation.

The collaborative nature of this exhibit and its main themes offer just one example of a recent U.S.-Chinese transnational collaboration to remember their alliance during World War II. Yet why did people from these two countries that are no longer enemies, but still have a tense relationship, come together seventy years later to celebrate their wartime history? And why have the Flying Tigers remained salient in both countries for so long?

The shifting nature of the commemoration of the Flying Tigers allows us to explore four particular issues: how historical memory links with national identity, relationships between vernacular and official memory, the process of transnational memory, and the U.S.-Chinese relationship at different points in history. How exactly are wartime memories connected to national identity? And how can tracing the ebbs and flows of wartime memory provide us a window into the U.S.-Chinese relationship?

This thesis attempts to answer those questions by examining the evolution of the memory of the Flying Tigers in both the United States and China from the war years through the present. I explore how domestic politics, international relations, and popular and public memory can come together to keep specific events and people relevant through time. Conversely, I also examine how the memory of specific collaborations can be a point of contention or reconciliation later on. I particularly focus on the role of three major interest groups in both countries who have been instrumental in creating, shaping and promoting the memory of the Flying Tigers: the Chinese locals and Flying Tiger veterans; the governments and militaries; and popular media.

### Historiography

This project is rooted in World War II history, particularly situated within the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theater, and seeks to bring together the wartime histories of the U.S. and China. Exploring the collaboration and how it has been remembered expands existing World War II literature in different ways. It calls attention to the U.S.-Chinese alliance during the war and to the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theater, often considered the “forgotten war” of World War II. Historians of World War II history have largely focused on either the European Theater, the U.S.-Japan battles or East Asian conflicts. Examining the Flying Tigers is useful in exploring this particular understudied aspect of World War II.

Reflecting the understudied nature of the CBI Theater, the Flying Tigers have only started attracting historical attention in the past two decades. While the first scholarly monograph on the Flying Tigers was written in 1963, the vast majority of scholarly works have been published in the last twenty years. Earlier works such as Martha Byrd’s *Chennault: Giving Wings to the Tiger* and John Toland’s *The Flying Tigers* tend to romanticize the Flying Tigers.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Martha Byrd, *Chennault: Giving Wings to the Tiger*, (Tuscaloosa, Al.: University of Alabama Press, 1987). And John Toland. *The Flying Tigers*. New York: Random House, 1963.

More recent works have taken a more critical perspective on the operation. The two most comprehensive and cutting edge works about the Flying Tigers argue against conventional understandings of the operation and challenge readers to re-think the U.S.-Chinese alliance. Daniel Ford's *Flying Tigers: Claire Chennault and his American Volunteers, 1941-1942*, first published in 1991 and reprinted twice since, argues that the significance of the Flying Tigers was not so much their military achievements, but rather their ability to bring hope to the Chinese people and the Allies.<sup>2</sup> William Grieve's monograph, *The American Military Mission to China, 1941-1942*, emphasizes the unequal nature of the U.S.-Chinese alliance by examining how these dynamics played out through Flying Tigers.<sup>3</sup> While scholarly works such as those of Ford and Grieve discuss the operation in a historical framework, neither of these explore how American and Chinese views of the Flying Tigers have developed and evolved since the war years.

While this project is grounded in the field of history, I will be drawing heavily from historical memory scholarship. The discrepancy in how each nation repurposes the memories of the operation highlights the complexity of historical memory. As French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs wrote in *On Collective Memory*, individual understanding of historical events is deeply interconnected with social memory.<sup>4</sup> This interpretation gives significant agency to group actors in society, such as the government, veterans, and popular media, that I have identified as the main actors in shaping Flying Tiger memory. The past is not only framed by the politics and needs of the present, Halbwachs argued, it is also interpreted by institutions from which historical memory is deployed within a nation through education, popular media and

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel Ford, *Flying Tigers: Claire Chennault and his American Volunteers, 1941-1942*, (Durham, NH: Warbird Books, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> William G. Grieve, *The American Military Mission to China, 1941-1942: Lend-Lease Logistics, Politics and the Tangles of Wartime Cooperation*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014), 9-10.

<sup>4</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992), 182.

commemorative events.<sup>5</sup> From French historian Pierre Nora, I draw on his concept of *lieux de mémoire* or sites of memory, to frame my use of primary sources. According to Nora, sites of memory are the tangible, often physical spaces such as monuments, museums, archives and cemeteries, which allow a society to hold onto moments of history that might otherwise be forgotten.<sup>6</sup> I use his concept in thinking about what nonconventional primary sources such as museums, memorials, and online forums can communicate, as sites of memory that Nora contends, would be useless if “the remembrance they protect were truly living presences in our lives.”<sup>7</sup> In terms of the Flying Tigers, Nora’s definition of sites of memory is fitting, as a group whose unofficial status has both benefitted and challenged how different actors have memorialized the group.

Tracing the memory of the Flying Tigers provides us a window into how these nations are viewing themselves and their binational relationship at different moments in history. Halbwachs and Nora both frame memory as being informed by the present; as such, the way these two nations present the Flying Tigers at different moments can reveal how they viewed each other and themselves at these different times. Thus, this portrayal is intimately tied with national identity and international relations. The state’s manipulation of historical memory serves different political needs such as using the past to justify current international relations and using historical memory to legitimize power and construct a sense of unified identity. The study of the Flying Tigers allows us to track the evolution of memory over a long period of time, maintain a

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>6</sup> Pierre Nora, “General Introduction: Between Memory and History,” In *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, edited by Lawrence D. Kritzman, translated by Arthur Goldhammer, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 6.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 7.



comparative perspective and explore a collaboration between two nations whose friendship quickly deteriorated after the alliance.

My research inserts the Flying Tigers into Chinese and American World War II memory scholarship. Chinese memory scholars have identified a shift in war memory from a victor to victim narrative. The victor narrative, promoted by the Communists from 1949, framed the Anti-Japanese War as the Party's path to victory, and claimed that China's victory over Japan was achieved by a united Chinese race under the leadership of the Communist Party. This effectively erased the Nationalists, as well as any foreign collaborators from the war narrative.<sup>8</sup> In the 1980s, the Chinese government began to promote a victim narrative that focused on Chinese suffering under western and Japanese imperialism. Recently, Chinese memory scholars have established the "national humiliation discourse," in which China's sense of humiliation from its century of being subjected to western imperialism from the mid-1800s became the basis of Chinese war memory.<sup>9</sup> While Chinese history scholarship has touched on the Flying Tigers, memory scholarship has not explored the Flying Tigers in much depth.

Nor do the Flying Tigers get much attention in scholarship on American memory. American history scholars have noted that in the U.S., World War II is remembered as the "good war" in which American ideals of freedom led the U.S. to victory, and a new position as the global leader. Two works that I use for reference are John Bodnar's *The "Good War" in American Memory* and Emily Rosenberg's *A Date Which Will Live*<sup>10</sup>; Bodnar's monograph

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<sup>8</sup> Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 102-103.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-48.

<sup>10</sup> John Bodnar, *The "Good War" in American Memory*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011) and Emily S. Rosenberg, *A Date Which Will Live: Pearl Harbor in American History*, (Durham N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2005).

provides an overview of the evolution of American war memory while Rosenberg discusses the memory of Pearl Harbor as an iconic event in the U.S., providing me with a model for examining the memory of one event throughout history. Like these works, most U.S. World War II memory studies focus on conflicts within the European theater or the Pacific war with Japan. America's alliance with China, and China's contribution to the Allied war effort has largely been left out of the U.S. narrative of the war.

Finally, this study adds to a relatively new body of work on transnational and comparative World War II memory. In 2003, Mike Mochizuki at George Washington University began the first significant research project in transnational memory, the "Memory and Reconciliation in the Asia-Pacific" project. In 2006, Gi-Wook Shin and Daniel C. Snider spearheaded the "Divided Memories and Reconciliation" project at Stanford University, producing works such as *History Textbooks and the Wars in Asia* and *Divergent Memories: Opinion Leaders and the Asia-Pacific War*, which I draw from to connect the dots between national identity, wartime memory and international relations.<sup>11</sup> However, this burgeoning literature focuses on transnational memory either within East Asia or between Japan and the United States. For transnational memory scholars, the implications of wartime memory extend to possible reconciliations between nations. I aim to draw upon this framework by exploring how the U.S. and China can navigate their constantly evolving relationship through wartime memory, specifically the memory of the Flying Tigers.

### Background

The story of the Flying Tigers and the events of the Second Sino-Japanese War are closely related. Tensions had been building up between China and Japan since 1932 when the

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<sup>11</sup> Gi-Wook Shin and Daniel Snider (eds), *History Textbooks and the Wars in Asia*, (New York: Routledge, 2011) and Gi-Wook Shin and Daniel Snider, *Divergent Memories: Opinion Leaders and the Asia-Pacific War*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

Japanese Imperial Army set up Manchukuo as a puppet state of Japan. Japan and China officially declared war following the Marco Polo Bridge Incident of July 7, 1937.<sup>12</sup> Knowing that China's poorly trained and equipped military was ill-prepared to fight alone, Chiang Kai-shek – the military and political leader of China from 1928 to 1949 – started looking outward for help. Given the rising tensions in Europe with the rise of Hitler, Chiang turned to the United States, as the most likely power to support China.<sup>13</sup> However, the U.S. government had adopted an isolationist policy through three neutrality acts in 1935, 1937 and 1939, to prevent the U.S. from being involved in another foreign war.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the American public and government's isolationist mindset, Chiang Kai-shek found a potential ally in Lieutenant General Claire Lee Chennault. In the early 1930s, the Air Force Tactical School's commander asked Chennault to put together an aerobatic team, which Chennault saw as a chance to test out his combat flying techniques.<sup>15</sup> In December 1935, General Mow Pang Tsu of the Chinese Air Force saw Chennault's team, "Three Men on a Flying Trapeze," perform and was impressed by the team's skills.<sup>16</sup> At the time, Soong Meiling, Chiang Kai-Shek's wife, was in charge of the Chinese Air Force, and hoped to hire Chennault as the de facto Air Force Commander of the Chinese military. Unable to secure official U.S. military support, Soong reached out to Chennault directly. After months of negotiation, he agreed to a

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<sup>12</sup> Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally: China's World War II, 1937-1945*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), 79-80.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 82-83.

<sup>14</sup> "The Neutrality Acts, 1930s," Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs, United States Department of State, accessed February 26, 2018. And Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World At Arms: A Global History of World War II*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 17.

<sup>15</sup> Eisel Braxton, "The Flying Tigers: Chennault's American Volunteer Group in China." *Air Force History & Museums Program: Air Force Sixtieth Anniversary Commemorative Edition*, 4.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

two-year contract and traveled to China the day after retiring as a captain in the United States Army Air Corps in April 1937.<sup>17</sup> From then, Chennault was in charge of inspecting the Chinese Air Force, and directing combat training of the Chinese pilots. He also set up an early warning network in Southwestern China.<sup>18</sup> In 1940, with the support of T.V. Soong – Soong Meiling’s brother and a prominent businessman – Chennault put together a plan for the first American Volunteer Group (AVG), which became widely known as the Flying Tigers.

The obscure provisions of the AVG in some ways set the terms for the operation. Due to the still neutral status of the United States at the time, Roosevelt sanctioned the operation unofficially, which later proved to be both beneficial and detrimental to the group. The few in the government who were aware of the project were torn by questions of legality and the logistical benefits of keeping China in the war.<sup>19</sup> As a non-official U.S. military unit, the men who volunteered were required to withdraw from their posts in the U.S. military, travel to China as civilians, and enlist as part of the Chinese Nationalist Army. Organizers had to keep the operation secret and somewhat legal. The equipment, aircraft, and men were paid for through a company called the Chinese Aircraft Manufacturing Company (CAMCO), run by an American businessman, William Pawley.<sup>20</sup> The money came from a loan from the U.S. government to the Chinese government.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>19</sup> William Grieve argues that U.S. support of China through the Lend-Lease Bill and the American Military Mission to China was designed to keep China in the war to hold down the Japanese troops. See Grieve, 9-10.

<sup>20</sup> Braxton, 9.

<sup>21</sup> Through the Lend-Lease Bill, the U.S. government loaned the Chinese government \$3.5 million in credit; the final cost for China for the AVG’s services was \$8.8 million for aircraft and personnel costs. From Daniel Jackson, *Famine, Sword, and Fire: the Liberation of Southwest China in World War II* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd, 2015), 339 and Claire Lee Chennault, *Way of a Fighter: the Memoirs of Claire Lee Chennault*, (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1949).

During its seven months of operation, the Flying Tigers included 99 fighter pilots, 184 ground crew and approximately 100 aircraft, although only five to twenty of those planes were serviceable per day during the first ten weeks.<sup>22</sup> Pilots and crew joined the AVG for many reasons: extremely good pay,<sup>23</sup> the desire to serve honorably for an international cause, an interest in going on an exciting adventure, and the opportunity to escape from the mundane.<sup>24</sup> Their mission consisted of protecting the Burma Road, engaging in air battles against the Japanese Imperial Air Force and later on, protecting the Hump Route. By 1941, as a result of the Japanese invasions of China's major coastal and inland cities, the Burma Road was the last remaining land supply route for China. When the Japanese cut off the Burma Road in early 1942, the Allies utilized the Hump Route, the air route over the Himalayas.

While the operation only lasted for seven months from December 1941 to July 1942, the presence of the Flying Tigers, more than their military victories, proved to have an immensely positive effect on the morale of the Chinese and American public. As the only source of victories for the Allies in the early years of the war, the Flying Tigers were widely regarded as heroes. With the official declaration of war between the U.S. and Japan, the U.S. government moved to incorporate the AVG as an official military unit.<sup>25</sup> In July 1942, the Flying Tigers were disbanded after the U.S. government and military inducted the group into the 10th Air Force, as

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<sup>22</sup> These numbers fluctuate throughout the planning process and even during the operation but these are the generally accepted numbers. See Braxton, 10 and Rebecca Grant, "Flying Tiger, Hidden Dragon." *Air Force Magazine*, March 2002, 77.

<sup>23</sup> Pilots were paid \$600 a month, squadron commanders \$750, and received a bonus of \$500 for every Japanese plane shot down. See Chennault, *Chennault and the Flying Tigers*, 85. And Central Aircraft Manufacturing Company Federal INC, U.S.A., "Agreement" and "Summary of Terms of Employment" (1941) and Chester W. Nimitz "Release from Active Duty and Resignation from U.S. Naval Reserve" (Washington D.C.: Navy Department Bureau of Navigation, 1941). Archived in Simin Peng (彭思民) private collection. Visited December 25, 2017.

<sup>24</sup> See Braxton, 13. Also Charles R. Bond, and Terry Anderson. *A Flying Tiger's Diary*. College Station, (TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1988), 19.

<sup>25</sup> Byrd, 137.

the 23rd Fighter Group of the China Air Task Force. In 1943, the U.S. government established the 14<sup>th</sup> Air Force, which consisted of the 68<sup>th</sup>, 69<sup>th</sup> Composite Wings and the Chinese-American Composite Wing (CACW), that included more than fifty Chinese soldiers who had trained in Arizona, and eleven Chinese commanders across the composite units.<sup>26</sup> The issue of who is considered a “Flying Tiger” differs considerably between the two nations: a debate that I will be exploring in Chapter 1.

### Organization

This thesis is organized thematically, focusing on three main themes: the romanticization of the Flying Tigers, the instrumentalization of this memory by various actors, and a reflection of the transnational nature of the collaboration. Because the project is more thematic than chronological, some pieces of evidence will be used in multiple chapters to exemplify different ideas. In my research, I analyze museums and exhibits, including some that I visited over Winter Term. While museums are often regarded as objective institutions, museums also promote specific narratives and create silences that differ depending on the actors behind the institution.<sup>27</sup> For the purposes of this project, I look to museums and exhibits to see *how* public and private museums portray and teach the public about the Flying Tigers. I also look at memoirs, films, documentaries, newsreels, periodicals, government documents, memoirs, and fan organization websites in my analyses.

Chapter one will explore how the Flying Tigers have been romanticized in both the U.S. and China, with various sites of memory emphasizing the group as a symbol of heroic masculinity and of honor. In this chapter, I utilize newsreels as a source because while they are

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<sup>26</sup> “Flying Tigers Memorial Museum Guilin in China” (*Meiguo Feihudui Guilin Jinianguan*) 美国飞虎队桂林纪念馆 Guangxi, China, Permanent museum, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (New York: Oxford International Publishers Ltd. 2007), 8.

episodic and short in length, the tone, word choice, sound effects and imagery reveal clues about the social and political atmosphere, and official narratives about events or other nations. In addition to newsreels, I will also be using a 1942 film, periodicals, and memoirs to answer the following questions: how and why have the Flying Tigers been romanticized in both the U.S. and China in the war years? How have they continued to be romanticized in the postwar period, and in the present? How did Pearl Harbor, as a turning point in U.S. involvement, affect the way the Flying Tigers were portrayed?

Chapter two discusses how various actors such as locals and veterans, governments and militaries, and popular media, have utilized the memory of the Flying Tigers as a symbol to serve specific political purposes both domestically and internationally. In the U.S., the Flying Tigers become a symbol of anti-communism and democracy; in China, the operation becomes a way to assert itself as a critical part of the global anti-fascist war. This chapter will consider the role of international relations and conflict on memories of friendship. During a time of intense conflict between political and ideological systems, such as the Cold War, commemorating a collaboration with the enemy would certainly complicate and challenge official narratives of the conflict. How is the image of the Flying Tigers deployed in China and the U.S. after 1949 when the Communists win the Chinese Civil War and establish the People's Republic of China? And how does the presence of Nationalist Taiwan complicate the memory of the operation?

Lastly, chapter three will analyze how both nations have reflected on the transnational nature of the collaboration. While themes of U.S. supremacy and Chinese gratefulness have remained constant from the 1940s, sites of memory from the 2000s have recast these motifs to portray the alliance as a more equal partnership. As such, unlike the previous two chapters, which are more thematic, this chapter is much more about the modern day. This chapter will

draw from a variety of sources including newsreels, memoirs, and post-2000's collaborative museums and exhibits, documentaries, and government speeches. How has the collaboration been portrayed in both nations, and what do they mean domestically? How have the different actors repurposed the themes of the past to benefit themselves and their nation?

This project seeks to explore the evolution of the memory of the Flying Tigers from the 1940s through the present. I am not concerned so much with the history of the Flying Tigers, as I am with how they have been remembered and what they have meant to people and states. I argue that from the war years through the present, the memory of the Flying Tigers have converged and diverged between (and within) the U.S. and China. Although some of the narratives have been deliberately obscured at times, the memories have been able to coexist without much tension. The romantic narratives of the operation have served the needs of actors ranging from veterans and locals, to the national governments, in constructing themselves, and ultimately the nation, in a positive way. Therefore, the memory of the Flying Tigers, often a result of the interplay between all of the different actors, has become a space through which both nations can promote their own national identity and imagine reconciliation through this model of transnational friendship.



## Chapter One: Romanticization of the Flying Tigers

In October 1942, Republic Pictures Corporation released a movie entitled *Flying Tigers*, starring John Wayne, John Carroll and Anna Lee.<sup>1</sup> While the film was fictional, it was set within the context of the Flying Tigers in China, with a character loosely based on Chennault, and the rest of the members as young, adventurous pilots. With its catchphrase—“Strong brave men flying in the face of death that we may live”—across the top of the movie poster,<sup>2</sup> and an orange shark-toothed plane against the backdrop of an explosion, the poster foreshadowed the glorification of the operation that was obvious in the film’s content and tone. The AVG members themselves disliked the film, giving it “low marks for realism and accuracy,” and even referred to it as “one of the worst movies of all time.”<sup>3</sup> But the general public made it one of the most successful films of 1942.<sup>4</sup> It was even nominated for three Oscars.<sup>5</sup> A *New York Times* movie review described *Flying Tigers* as “a romantic adventure tale and only incidentally a record of the famous American Volunteer Group that wrote history in the China sky against an overwhelmingly superior enemy.”<sup>6</sup> The film promoted a romanticized version of the AVG, one suffused with tropes of heroism, masculinity and sacrifice.

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<sup>1</sup> *Flying Tigers*. Produced by Edmund Grainger, Russell Kimball, Otto Siegel, and Adele Palmer. Directed by David Miller. Performed by John Wayne, John Carroll, Anna Lee, and others. (1942: Los Angeles, Republic Pictures Corporation), online version.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix I, Figure 4.

<sup>3</sup> Both quotes from Bill Yenne, *When Tigers Ruled the Sky: The Flying Tigers: American Outlaw Pilots over China in WWII*, (New York: Dutton Caliber, 2016), 154.

<sup>4</sup> See Randy Roberts, “John Wayne and Wartime Hollywood: John Wayne Goes to War,” in *Hollywood’s America, Twentieth Century America Through Film*, ed. Steven Mintz and Randy W. Roberts, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 158.

<sup>5</sup> The film was nominated for Best Sound, Recording; Best Effects, Special Effects; Best Music, Scoring of a Dramatic or Comedy Picture. See “Flying Tigers,” IMDb, accessed March 2, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> “Movie Review: At the Capitol,” *The New York Times*, October 1942.

This chapter explores how and why the Flying Tigers became depicted as heroic and romantic figures, initially in 1941-1942, but also by American veterans, Chinese locals and popular media in subsequent years. It also examines how the construction of a positive, heroic version of the Flying Tiger story differed in the United States and China. Popular media American portrayals focused on the heroism of the American pilots and downplayed the contribution of the Chinese people, although Flying Tiger veterans often told a more complicated story. Chinese portrayals, from the wartime and after, recognized the valor of the Americans but recent sites of memory have insisted too on the active role played by the Chinese people.

For the purposes of this project, “romanticization” refers to the portrayal of the Flying Tigers as heroic figures: daring, masculine, and brave young saviors. The romanticization of the AVG is important to the evolution of their memory because it is the starting point of almost eighty years of continued remembrance, and is the foundation that has allowed various actors after the war to utilize their story to promote different interests. As Chapters two and three will discuss, while the memory of the operation and the men involved has been manipulated and re-highlighted over time, the key representations of the group stems from the romanticized narrative constructed during the war years. Even through periods of tension between the U.S. and China, the heroic narrative has survived and resurfaced, especially among the veterans. Drawing from newsreels, memoirs, periodicals, testimonies, documentaries, and a film from 1942, this chapter will explore the ways in which the Flying Tigers became and remained a romanticized symbol of masculinity and heroism in both nations.

The Flying Tigers were not initially viewed in such a positive light. Before the Pearl Harbor attack and the AVG’s first mission, government, military and civilian perception towards the group in the U.S. was largely negative, characterized by skepticism and doubt. Chennault

notes in his memoir, *Way of a Fighter*, “The experts said the American Volunteer Group wouldn’t last three weeks in combat,” exemplifying the powerful voices of doubt that the AVG faced.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, current narratives still recognize initial negative reactions toward the operation. Yunnan TV, a public TV channel, produced the documentary, “Flying Tigers, The Legendary Cowboys” in 2014, which commented “Americans didn’t have high hopes and expectations for them [the AVG members], people just thought of them as young kids who wanted stimuli and danger.”<sup>8</sup> Early observers characterized Tiger volunteers as reckless adventure-seekers. AVG chaplain Paul Frillmann, recalls “wonder[ing] whether his family had been right to call him a fool for going off with a ‘bunch of harum-scarum adventurers.’”<sup>9</sup> Skepticism was widespread among the military, government, and civilians who knew of the operation.

Many in the military also questioned the legality of the group. Although President Roosevelt offered his personal sanction, he could not grant the operation official status within the U.S military. Given its quasi-legal status, many people within the government were unaware of the operation until men started asking permission to withdraw from their posts. Many saw the action as out of line and outrageous. On the difficulty in attaining personnel, Chennault recalled, “it took direct personal intervention from President Roosevelt to pry the pilots and ground crews from the army and navy.”<sup>10</sup> Chennault expressed frustration with the military’s unwillingness to invest in his operation. He complained in his memoir, “the military were violently opposed to the whole idea of American volunteers in China. I tried to convince them of the large return in

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<sup>7</sup> Claire Lee Chennault, *Way of a Fighter*, ed. Robert Hotz, (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1949), xix.

<sup>8</sup> “Flying Tigers, The Legendary Cowboys” (*Feihu Chuanqi Zhi Hui Fei de Niuzai*) <飞虎传奇之会飞的牛仔>, Documentary, (2014; Kunming: 云南卫视), online version, translated by author.

<sup>9</sup> John Frillmann and Graham Peck, *China: The Remembered Life*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), quoted in Martha Byrd, Chennault: Giving Wings to the Tiger, (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1987), 118.

<sup>10</sup> Chennault, 84.

tactics... and equipment evaluation they would get from a small investment in personnel.”<sup>11</sup>

While isolationism was still a popular sentiment among the American public, by 1940 the U.S. military had started seriously preparing for war and officers were reluctant to give up their resources and servicemen to a clandestine operation in China.

There was also serious doubts about whether this could be a successful operation. As an unofficial operation, the AVG did not have the resources and equipment they needed. *Life* magazine reported in July 1942, right after the AVG was disbanded, that there were “never more than 50 planes...in commission at once nor more than 18 planes, or a squadron, in the air at any one point.”<sup>12</sup> Considering the discrepancy in quality and technology between the P-40 Tomahawks and the Japanese fighters, and the scale of the operations, the odds did not look good for Chennault and the Flying Tigers.

While the unofficial status of the Flying Tigers initially raised doubts, it was and continues to be the focal point for the romanticization of the group. While their status was at the root of their many logistical issues, it also fostered the image of the men as daring heroes who risked their lives for the survival of another country in need. The constant description of AVG members as “volunteers” in newsreels, documentaries, and scholarly works highlights the sacrifice made by these men, and has become one reason why they have been so widely celebrated. In a newsreel from 1942, the narrator glorifies the fact that the Flying Tigers started their mission before the U.S. had officially entered the war when he proudly exclaims, “Volunteering before the United States entered the war, these amazing young men have

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>12</sup> Clare Boothe, “Life’s Reports: The A.V.G Ends Its Famous Career,” *LIFE*, July 20, 1942.

astounded the world with their heroism and daring.”<sup>13</sup> The unofficial status of the operation and volunteer status of the men meant that they could be portrayed as fighting for principle rather than because they had been drafted or assigned to China.

The fact that these men chose to serve in China contributed to their public valorization and continues to do so today. In a public discussion page on the official Flying Tigers website created by family members of former AVG members, one group member describes the operation as “a matter of ‘opportunity’ that not everyone was privy to...by choice or by chance...the members of the AVG were a very special group, in a very unique situation.”<sup>14</sup> It is this individual choice each member made under no obligation and against the daunting odds that signals their heroism. Likewise, in a newsreel from the later war years, the narrator states, “And to the aid of China came volunteers from other lands. Men who pledged themselves to fight against tyranny and oppression no matter where.”<sup>15</sup> The concept of individual decisions is closely tied to their bravery, and intimately tied with core U.S. ideals of freedom and democracy. The fact that they signed up despite the skepticism and amid questions of the operation’s legality became evidence that they were righteously rebellious and masculine.

Popular media in the United States proved pivotal in constructing what has become the American version of the Flying Tigers story, one that portrayed the American fliers as romantic heroes who sought to protect Chinese locals portrayed as childlike or dependent. The 1942 film, *Flying Tigers*, mentioned in the opening of the chapter, not only portrays the AVG members as heroic figures, but also depicts the Chinese as children in need of protection. The intensity of the

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<sup>13</sup> United Newsreel, “Flying Tigers Joins U.S. Air Force in China (1942),” April 29, 2011, Accessed June 28, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Bill C (2010, December 11). Use of Flying Tiger Name. Message posted to [http://www.forums.flyingtigersavg.com/index.php?as=t8jmp2owsnr55eilwnbpkfx0tdq4ig0o&tid=269&title=Use\\_of\\_Flying\\_Tiger\\_name](http://www.forums.flyingtigersavg.com/index.php?as=t8jmp2owsnr55eilwnbpkfx0tdq4ig0o&tid=269&title=Use_of_Flying_Tiger_name)

<sup>15</sup> “Flying Tigers Come to the Defense of China,” Flying Tigers Historical Organization, December 30, 2010. Accessed June 28, 2017.

combat scenes and the frequent close-ups of each of the pilots within the violent scenes foreshadow a new era of military history in which fighter pilots are the new heroes of warfare because of their individualism and relative control over their own fate.<sup>16</sup> The AVG members are glamorously depicted as the ultimate heroes, while the Chinese are their loyal fans. In any scene when an American pilot lands in the air fields, the Chinese locals run up to the pilots like young children excitedly reunited with their parents after a long wait; there is a stark contrast in attitudes between the calm and proud American men and the pure, child-like Chinese locals throughout the film.

The plot line and main characters of the film provides the audience with two models of American masculine heroism. The love triangle between Captain Jim Gordon, rebellious Woody Jason, and the charismatic nurse Brooke Elliot, depicts two versions of masculinity. John Wayne's character, Gordon, is responsible and has a strong sense of duty, whereas Jason is an overconfident troublemaker. Although the other pilots initially dislike Jason, he goes through a change of heart after volunteering at Elliot's orphanage. The children later present him with handmade rice cakes with a message interpreted by Elliot, "We are humbly grateful and beg you to accept these useless rice cakes even though they are not worthy of so honorable and brave a warrior."<sup>17</sup> The film portrays the heroism and masculinity of the AVG in part through the Chinese characters' grateful and excessive admiration of the pilots. By equating Jason with a "warrior" through the eyes of a young Chinese girl, the association romanticizes the character and establishes a gendered and racial dynamic, creating boundaries of male and female, adult and child, American and Chinese. The film ends with Jason performing the ultimate act of sacrifice,

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<sup>16</sup> Jeanine Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre*, (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 32.

<sup>17</sup> *Flying Tigers*, 1942.

during which he goes on a suicide mission by flying into a Japanese supply train, saving Gordon's life in the process. The selflessness embodied by Jason speaks to the selflessness and volunteer spirit of the Flying Tigers who are also sacrificing themselves for the survival of the appreciative Chinese locals.

In ways similar to the film, popular media in the early 1940s also glamorized Chennault, the AVG pilots, and even the P-40 planes that were used by the operation. Newsreels from 1942 described Chennault's AVG as "the terror of the Eastern skies," and played up the importance of the mission despite the small number of fighters. "American aid to China, although slight in most respects, has shown what it may be when more U.S. pilots like these fly a pattern of victory over the Far Eastern front," one newsreel declared.<sup>18</sup> Both of these descriptions romanticized the operation with phrases that portray the entire sky as belonging to the Flying Tigers. Another newsreel from during the war began with a shot of three P-40's flying overhead, which put the audience in the position to admire the planes from below. The narrator says, "For many months, their [the Flying Tigers'] bullets held open the Burma Road, beating a deadly tattoo upon the planes of Japan's Air Force. Former army, navy, marine officers, transport pilots, they're the last of the world's soldiers of fortune."<sup>19</sup> By personifying the bullets of the planes as "holding open" the Burma Road, and "beating a deadly tattoo" on Japanese planes, the newsreel emphasized the masculine power of the Flying Tigers.

The celebration of the Flying Tigers as bold heroes intensified after their first combat mission, which took place just a few weeks after the December 7, 1941 Japanese attack on the American fleet at Pearl Harbor. It was only on December 29, 1941, nine days after the AVG flew

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<sup>18</sup> Both quotes from Official Films Newsreel, "1942 Vol. 2 FLYING TIGERS, BATTLE OF MIDWAY 8473." United States, 1942. July 9, 2014. Accessed June 29, 2017.

<sup>19</sup> "Flying Tigers Joins U.S. Air Force in China (1942)."

their first mission, that the group was introduced to the American public via the last *Time* Magazine issue of the year.<sup>20</sup> The article entitled “Blood for the Tigers” described the AVG’s first combat in this way: “Last week ten Japanese bombers came winging their carefree way up into Yunnan... the Flying Tigers swooped, let the Japanese have it. Of the ten bombers... four plummeted to earth in flames. The rest turned tail and fled. Tiger casualties: none.”<sup>21</sup> The strong action verbs here emphasized the strength of the Flying Tigers. The combination of Pearl Harbor and the AVG’s first combat became a turning point for how the Flying Tigers gained recognition and attention. In his memoir, *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, Major Gregory “Pappy” Boyington recalled that in the early weeks of the operation, “Nobody seemed to know who we were, where we were going, or anything else, and apparently didn’t give a damn.”<sup>22</sup> But after their first combat mission, attitudes changed: journalists from all over the world flew to China to meet the members.<sup>23</sup> The popularity of the Flying Tigers prompted *Life* Magazine to have a “Straight from the Tiger’s Mouth” section in which a cablegram from Chennault received a whole spread; he wrote, “Excellent quality of workmanship and materials have made possible the outstanding performance of these engines in their dogfights with the enemy over the rice paddies.”<sup>24</sup> Chennault here smartly acknowledged and complimented the overall American war effort, while also praising his group and highlighting their active involvement in fierce “dogfights” in a far away part of the world.

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<sup>20</sup> Eisel Braxton, "The Flying Tigers: Chennault's American Volunteer Group in China." *Air Force History & Museums Program: Air Force Sixtieth Anniversary Commemorative Edition*, 11.

<sup>21</sup> *Time* Magazine, December 1941, 21.

<sup>22</sup> Gregory “Pappy” Boyington, *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1958), 19.

<sup>23</sup> Yenne, 155-156.

<sup>24</sup> *LIFE*, July 20, 1942, 5.



The shark-mouthed P-40s became an iconic symbol of the AVG. In July 20, 1942, *Life* published a photo spread of the AVG, featuring the P-40s, and especially the shark teeth design of the planes.<sup>25</sup> This issue was printed after the group had already been disbanded, so the article adopted a somewhat nostalgic tone that highlighted the group's success against challenging odds. "The account with which the AVG proceeded to give of itself justified not only Chennault's untried gospel of the flying team but America's untried faith in her sons of the sky"; the article declared America as a mother having "faith in her sons."<sup>26</sup> The link to a religion or a faith with the use of the word, "gospel," further romanticized and masculinized the AVG pilots. An article by the Flying Tigers US Organization for the operation's 70th anniversary also drew attention to the fierce P-40 shark mouth designs, commenting that the Japanese bomber group "knew they were no match for the American fighter planes with the leering Tiger Shark mouths painted on their engine cowling."<sup>27</sup> Similarly, the Chinese documentary produced in 2017 by the national Beijing TV Documentary Channel, "Combat in the Air, the Battles of the Flying Tigers" also personifies the shark-mouthed P-40s. The documentary ends with the narration, "the shark mouthed P-40s challenged the forces of tyranny with incredible ferocity,"<sup>28</sup> a phrase that connotes intensity and masculine violence.

On the Chinese side, I look to government policy and local contribution to the operation to gauge their sentiments of appreciation and admiration for the AVG. To account for the

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<sup>25</sup> See Appendix I, Figure 5.

<sup>26</sup> Both quotes from *LIFE*, July 20, 1942.

<sup>27</sup> "Kunming Air Battle Relived - First Flight for the Tigers Almost 70 Years Ago," Flying Tigers US. February 13, 2011. Accessed June 10, 2017.

<sup>28</sup> "Combat in the Air, the Battles of the Flying Tigers" (*Kongzhong Gedou Feihudui Zhi Zhan*) <空中格斗飞虎队之战>. BTV 纪录片影院. 2017. Accessed June 10, 2017. Although produced in China by a Chinese production company, the documentary has an English voiceover and Chinese subtitles.

language barrier between downed pilots and locals, every Flying Tiger pilot had a blood chit<sup>29</sup> usually sewn into their jacket or folded into their pockets: a silk sheet with the Chinese flag, Chiang Kai-shek's seal, and the message, "This is a foreigner helping China, all Chinese people (soldiers and civilians) unite and protect them," written in Chinese.<sup>30</sup> In *Touching the Tigers: Glen Beneda*, an English documentary co-produced in 2011 by The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries and China Friendship, Peace, and Development Foundation, the narrator recalls how the "KMT reported for all Chinese to protect and help all enemies of the Japanese."<sup>31</sup> The message on the blood chit, showed Chiang Kai-shek's and the Nationalist Party's<sup>32</sup> appreciation for the Flying Tigers. The Chinese government sought to protect the AVG members at all costs.

The locals, despite facing extreme poverty and threats from the Japanese, risked their lives for the AVG in two distinct ways. AVG veterans from the postwar period, and recent Chinese and collaborative sites of memory romanticized the role of the locals within the larger narrative of the Flying Tigers. The veterans especially have commemorated the locals in their own memoirs and testimonies, and recent museums have also recognized the Chinese locals. First, the locals did all of the hard physical labor necessary for the operation, such as building runways and airfields by hand. Newsreels that did showcase the role of the locals, did so in a way that reduced the locals to manual laborers. A U.S. newsreel from late 1943 showed Chinese laborers pulling carts, carrying pieces of big boulders, shoveling mud, and breaking rocks, while

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<sup>29</sup> See Appendix I, Figure 6.

<sup>30</sup> "Blood Chit," produced by Kuomintang Government, 1941. Archived in Simin Peng (彭思民) private collection. Visited December 25, 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Xiaolin Li, *Touching the Tigers: Glen Beneda*, online version, directed by Yue Hua (2011), documentary.

<sup>32</sup> Although the Nationalist Party are also referred to as Kuomintang (or Guomintang) and abbreviated as KMT, I will continue to use the term, "Nationalists." The only exception is if they are referred to in a different way in a primary source.

the narrator noted that the same people “who built the Burma road, are building airfields out of stones, mud, and patient tireless hands.”<sup>33</sup> In an American documentary produced by a private production company Max Media Asia, in 1999, *Wings Over China: The Story of the Flying Tigers in China*, a voice over of an interview with an AVG pilot plays over a clip of Chinese adults and children working on the Burma Road and the runways. “I can remember the big craters in the runway, and in a very short period of time, they [Chinese laborers] would have it covered up... maybe a couple hundred people pulling on those big rollers,” the pilot explained.<sup>34</sup> The viewer hears from the former AVG member, while simultaneously watching scenes of labor similar to what is being described playing out on the screen. Likewise, the Kunming Flying Tigers Museum in Kunming, Yunnan Province – a public museum – and the Flying Tigers Heritage Park in Guilin, Guangxi Province – a collaborative project between veterans, family members, and both governments – both give space in their exhibits to the Chinese locals for their integral contributions to the operation. In a section titled, “Chinese People’s Support of the Flying Tigers” at the Flying Tigers Museum, the panels take visitors through the ways in which the Nationalist military and civilians “tried hard to build, maintain and defend airfields; they set up an air-raid warning network, supplied with daily needs and ground service, and rescued wounded pilots.”<sup>35</sup> The bronze wall of the entrance to the Flying Tigers Heritage Park Museum is designed as a mural with carvings of around thirty Chinese laborers collectively pulling what look like two stone-rollers.<sup>36</sup> By establishing this scene of the Chinese laborers as soon as

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<sup>33</sup> “Flying Tigers Come to the Defense of China.”

<sup>34</sup> *Wings over China: The Story of the Flying Tigers in China, China’s Forgotten War*. Directed by Susan Yu. Produced by Susan Yu. 1999. Accessed June 10, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> Kunming Flying Tigers Museum (*Kunming Feihudui Jinianguan*) <昆明飞虎队纪念馆> Yunnan, China. Permanent museum. 2016.

<sup>36</sup> See Appendix I, Figure 7.

viewers walk into the museum, the museum makes a conscious statement about the importance of the local people within the overall operation.

The locals have also been commemorated for their efforts to rescue and feed wounded AVG members despite their own precarious situations. There are many stories of Chinese locals saving U.S. fighter pilots; narratives that are often promoted by the veterans who feel indebted to the locals who saved them. *Touching the Tigers* discusses how the locals rescued Glen Beneda when he crashed near Japanese territory. While being interviewed, Beneda's son explains how the locals hid his father in their own homes, snuck him through Japanese territory on a handmade stretcher during the night to a doctor, and fed him extremely well.<sup>37</sup> One of the most powerful sites in the Flying Tigers Heritage Park is a bronze monument of five Chinese locals carrying an injured Flying Tiger pilot on a makeshift stretcher with two Nationalist Army soldiers watching over them.<sup>38</sup> The monument makes clear how labor intensive and emotionally intensive this task was. The somber expressions of every figure combined with the forward-leaning poses is indicative of not only the bond between the locals and the Flying Tiger members but also embodies a sense of sacrifice on the part of the locals. By risking their lives to protect this foreigner who has volunteered to come help their country, the locals too were investing in the future of their country. And thus, the story of local contributions to the operation are linked with the overall narrative of both the heroic Flying Tigers and the glorious Chinese nation. Different sites of memory have made efforts to include the Chinese locals as being part of the operation, or at least giving them the credit they deserve, by recognizing the life risking decisions they were forced to make.

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<sup>37</sup> *Touching the Tigers: Glen Beneda*

<sup>38</sup> See Appendix I, Figure 8.

The Flying Tigers became iconic legends in the early years of the war, as the only unit among the Allies who was performing well. They managed to destroy approximately 115 Japanese fighter planes<sup>39</sup> and ended the bombings of Southwestern Chinese cities for the first time in three years.<sup>40</sup> Most important though, was their role as morale-boosters, providing a light and a source of celebration in the early months of U.S. involvement in World War II (the United States wouldn't achieve their first victory in the Pacific War until the Battle of Midway in June 1942).<sup>41</sup> A *New York Times* article from March 25, 1942, equated the victories of the AVG as a victory for all of the allies, "dropping down from the sky at 7am the United States airmen caught the Japanese pilots as they were running to the cockpits of their planes and pumped 3,500 rounds of ammunition into both grounded planes and personnel... it was a great day for the AVG, and for the Allies."<sup>42</sup> The animated language portrays the AVG as invincible. We can also see here that the victory of the Flying Tigers is closely associated with victory for the Allies, as if the U.S. is pulling the weight of the Allied forces.

In recent years, popular media and the internet especially, have continued the trend of romanticizing the Flying Tigers. In China, the trend can be seen through the production of documentaries and building of museums. Two recent Chinese documentaries exemplify this portrayal. In 2010, Chinese television host and producer Cui Yongyuan produced a documentary series entitled "My Anti-Japanese War," exploring various aspects of the war, with storylines

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<sup>39</sup> The estimated number of planes that the Flying Tigers shot down range from 115 to 294. Although Chennault wrote in his memoir that "299 Japanese aircraft were destroyed, with 153 more probably destroyed," Ford writes that bankroll records indicate CAMCO paid 294 planes worth of bonuses. See Daniel Ford, *Flying Tigers: Claire Chennault and His American Volunteers, 1941-1942*, rev. ed. (New York: Smithsonian Books, 2007) quoted in Braxton, 33.

<sup>40</sup> Chennault, xix.

<sup>41</sup> Rebecca Grant, "Flying Tiger, Hidden Dragon." *Air Force Magazine*, March 2002, 77.

<sup>42</sup> The Associated Press, "AVG Pilots Score," in "U.S. Fliers in Burma Smash 40 Planes," *New York Times*, March 25, 1942.

based on interviews with veterans and civilians who lived during the war. The documentary series is groundbreaking because of its incorporation of a wide range of narratives, most significantly the Nationalists. The episode entitled “Flying Tiger, Flying Tiger” is about the role of the Flying Tigers in Southwestern China, as told by locals who grew up during the war and a few who were in the subsequent Air Force units. The documentary is animation-based, allowing the director to create unique and expressive images. A “sunny sky” is a common motif within the documentary; every time the Flying Tigers are victorious in battle, the narrator happily announces, “Today there was another blue sunny sky for Kunming and China.”<sup>43</sup> The association of the AVG with the sky produces a romantic perception of the operation, as if to say that the Flying Tigers owned the vast, blue sky. The 2017 documentary, “Combat in the Air, the Battles of the Flying Tigers” glorifies the wartime aerial combat. The documentary starts with a view from a virtual cockpit, so that the audience can “experience the battle, dissect the tactics, [and] re-live the dogfights,” of the AVG experience.<sup>44</sup> Immediately the AVG are presented as a fierce group, when the narrator says, “A group of courageous American pilots known as the Flying Tigers take on an overwhelming might of the Japanese Imperial Air Force. These high-flying soldiers of fortune slash through the skies of the Far East...their fame spreads and tales of their daring exploits read like popular fiction.”<sup>45</sup> This film not only portrays the Flying Tigers as masculine, brave, pilots who have no fear, but also glamorizes the battles as an exciting story worthy of fiction.

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<sup>43</sup> “Flying Tiger, Flying Tiger” (*Feihu, Feihu*) <飞虎飞虎> from “My Anti-Japanese War” (*Wo de Kangzhan*) <我的抗战> 崔永元(2012) Accessed June 04, 2017. Translated by author.

<sup>44</sup> “Combat in the Air, the Battles of the Flying Tigers.”

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

Through recently built museums in China, it is evident that the Flying Tigers continue to be romanticized even almost eighty years later. In 2012, entrepreneur and private collector, Fan Jianchuan, created the “Jianchuan” Museum Cluster,” in which one of the twenty-five museum buildings is dedicated to the Flying Tigers. The English portion of the overview panel reads, “The ‘Flying Tigers’ quickly became a sharp sword in the struggle against Japan, and thus General Chennault and the members of the ‘Flying Tigers’ blazed their names in the annals of Chinese and American history.”<sup>46</sup> With the “sharp sword” metaphor, a layer of glamorization is added to the description of the AVG, as a sword conveys images of smooth and swift movement. The use of the word “blazed,” conveys a sense of violence and highlights the triumph of the AVG members. In the Flying Tigers Heritage Park, the romanticization of the operation emerges most at the park’s entrance where a white marble sculpture depicting four AVG members, two Chinese soldiers and one Chinese laborer all stand together in front of a shark-nosed P-40.<sup>47</sup> The smiling faces of these sculptures are hopeful, as if to reassure visitors that the Flying Tigers have everything under control. Behind the sculpture, the carvings of P-40s high up on the wall with sharp shark teeth provoke the viewer to think back to what it might have been like eighty years ago to look up and see the P-40s flying above. Lastly, at the Kunming Flying Tigers Museum, one panel presents a romantic narrative of the AVG men: the section is labeled “Flying Tigers Spread Their Wings.”<sup>48</sup> The introductory panel reads “A Chinese badge embellished their service caps and planes...They were adventurous and courageous, cherishing their glory. When the

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<sup>46</sup> Flying Tigers Exhibit Building at the JianChuan Museum (*Feihu Qibing Guan, Jianchuan Bowuguan*) <飞虎奇兵馆. 建川博物馆>, Sichuan, China, 2012.

<sup>47</sup> See Appendix I, Figure 9.

<sup>48</sup> Kunming Flying Tigers Museum

battle alarm sounded, they proceeded without hesitation...”<sup>49</sup> Here the Flying Tigers are presented as a courageous, daring group, reminiscent of the ways in which popular media during the war years discussed the AVG pilots. As a result, on the Chinese side, there seems to be a cyclical return to the portrayal of the AVG during the war years.

In the U.S. the continuation of the romanticized narrative is most evident in online discussions about the AVG carried out primarily by family members of veterans of the Flying Tigers. Here the insistence of seeing the Flying Tigers as especially heroic is reflected in heated debates over who should be considered a “Flying Tiger.” Family members of the Flying Tiger veterans have been active on AVG-related online forums and facebook pages in working to differentiate the group from other Air Force units that came later. While to the Chinese, all the American pilots who come during the war to Southwestern China are equally heroic, on the U.S. side, AVG veterans and their relatives draw a sharp distinction between the Flying Tigers and subsequent Air Force units.

In the 2010s, the debate gained traction once again. In December 2010, Lydia Rossi, an AVG pilot’s widow, restarted discussions on the question of “who is a Flying Tiger?” At the end of her post, she explained that, “to many it doesn’t matter, but for some of us it does matter, as we have to live with all the blurring and the deep sixing of the true “Flying Tigers” honor.<sup>50</sup> Another member wrote, “They [the AVG] stand a little taller than those of the many thousand members of the later groups...it was the members of the AVG who took the opportunity to volunteer to go to China and defend the Burma Road...Who wouldn’t want to be called ‘Flying

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Lydia Rossi, (2010, December 10), Use of Flying Tiger Name. Message posted to [http://www.forums.flyingtigersavg.com/index.php?as=t8jmp2owsnr55eilwnbpkfx0tdq4ig0o&tid=269&title=Use\\_of\\_Flying\\_Tiger\\_name](http://www.forums.flyingtigersavg.com/index.php?as=t8jmp2owsnr55eilwnbpkfx0tdq4ig0o&tid=269&title=Use_of_Flying_Tiger_name)



Tiger?”<sup>51</sup> Six years later in January 2016, the discussion was brought up again on Facebook, in a much more hostile way. Justin Fluegel, the moderator of the Facebook page made the decision to remove posts that “do not pertain to the AVG members of their memories.”<sup>52</sup> Fluegel complained that he had seen “14th AF [Air Force] groups on here,” which meant, he believed, that people were not “giving the AVG the identity and independent respect they deserve.”<sup>53</sup> The page’s rules, he explained, were “established to maintain the truth, understanding, and honor of those volunteers.”<sup>54</sup> Fluegel insisted that the status of the Flying Tigers as unofficial “volunteers” made them distinct from subsequent Air Force groups, who did not deserve the honor of being called Flying Tigers.

Repeated efforts by people to come back to this discussion even in recent years suggest that veterans and their families see it as important to protect the legacy and identity of the Flying Tigers as a particularly heroic group. By insisting on a narrow definition of who should be considered a Flying Tiger and highlighting the unofficial status of the group, veterans and their descendants continue to actively romanticize the group. The unofficial status of the group is what has been celebrated the most about the group as heroes, by veterans and family members.

This first chapter examined the construction of the myth of the Flying Tigers from the war years by exploring examples of romanticized narratives of the AVG through the present. While the romanticization takes place in both the U.S. and China, the romanticizing of the group in the U.S. stems from their unofficial status, connected to their image as heroic male

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<sup>51</sup> Bill C, (2010, December 11), Post to “Use of Flying Tiger Name” Forum. Message posted to [http://www.forums.flyingtigersavg.com/index.php?as=t8jmp2owsnr55eilwnbpkfx0tdq4ig0o&tid=269&title=Use\\_of\\_Flying\\_Tiger\\_name](http://www.forums.flyingtigersavg.com/index.php?as=t8jmp2owsnr55eilwnbpkfx0tdq4ig0o&tid=269&title=Use_of_Flying_Tiger_name)

<sup>52</sup> Justin Fluegel, (2016, January 23). “AVG – Flying Tigers – American Volunteer Group.” Posted to <https://www.facebook.com/groups/AVGflyingtigers/>

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

adventurers. In China, the romanticization of the AVG is based off of local and national appreciation for this group of foreigners that risked their lives for China. In recent years, the Flying Tiger veterans have promoted the memory of themselves and their history, but have for the most part, consistently highlighted the contributions of the Chinese locals. Thus, the heroization of the locals has become a common theme across both nations since the 2000s, with the emergence of recent sites of memory in China that also emphasize local contributions. The next chapter will discuss how different actors have instrumentalized the memory of the Flying Tigers to promote characteristics that both nations saw to be integral to their national identities. The interplay between those who were directly involved with the operation (locals and veterans) and the national governments becomes even more important in the next chapter as we see vernacular and official narratives within both nations diverging and converging at different moments.

## Chapter Two: Instrumentalization of Romanticized Narrative

In 2014, Eddie Long, a former member of the 14th Composite Air Force who has been internationally celebrated as a “Chinese Flying Tiger,” published Chinese and English versions of his memoir, *Hero of the Himalayas: The Life and Memoirs of a Chinese Flying Tiger*. Long was first interviewed in 2003 by Communist Party-run “People’s Daily” Newspaper (*Renmin Ribao*) and soon received inquiries from a hundred domestic and international media organizations.<sup>1</sup> By the early 2000s, the Chinese government recognized Long as a hero who had bravely fought the Japanese. But he had not always been so celebrated by Chinese authorities. Shortly after the end of the war, the newly victorious Communist government began to characterize Flying Tiger members like Long as “British-USA special agent[s].”<sup>2</sup> Long’s home was raided and authorities took away the pictures that showed him flying with the U.S. Air Force 14th Fleet. He was imprisoned for nineteen days and was monitored by the government even after being released.

The contrasting ways in which Long was treated in the immediate post-war period and the early 2000s reflects larger trends in Chinese World War II memory, as Chinese authorities reframed the war to reflect the politics of the Communist Party. Long’s experience corresponds with the ebb and flow of war memory in China; celebrated as a hero by the Nationalists during the war, denounced as an enemy after the Communist takeover, and re-celebrated in the current era by a more confident Communist government promoting a united Chinese identity.

In both the U.S. and China, governments, popular media and veterans deployed the narrative of the Flying Tigers for a variety of evolving political reasons from the 1940s through

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<sup>1</sup> Eddie Long, *Hero of the Himalayas: The Life and Memoirs of a Chinese Flying Tiger* (喜馬拉雅的英雄), (Outskirts Press, 2014), 22-23.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 237-238.

the 2000s. On one hand, we can see how the two nations have grappled with and defined what it means to be “American” or “Chinese.” On the other, the divergence in memories between the two nations reveals how they view each other and their relationship. The examination of the evolving representations of the group during a tumultuous time of international and domestic politics also reveals how wartime memory is closely linked with national identity, as states seek to define themselves. Moreover, this chapter explores the power and limitations of vernacular and official memory, as they coincide and diverge at different moments in history.

From the war years through the present, U.S.-Chinese relations have changed significantly: from wartime allies to bitter enemies immediately after, to tense rivals in the present. Within this context, both the American and Chinese governments, veterans, and popular media have framed the Flying Tigers in ways that illuminate the changing landscape of domestic and international politics. For the U.S., while the group continued to be associated with traditional American values of honor and democracy, government officials expanded the symbol of the Flying Tigers to encompass anti-communism during the Cold War. In China, the Communist Party’s victory in the Chinese Civil War ended the official celebration of the Flying Tigers due to the government’s narrative of a strong, independent Chinese nation united under the Party, neglecting the Nationalists and thus, any foreign collaborators. But in recent decades, Chinese officials and other promoters of AVG memory in China have turned to the history of the Flying Tigers as a way to showcase Chinese agency in the Second-Sino Japanese War and to thus portray China as an important contributor to the Allied victory in World War II.

#### Memory of the Flying Tigers in the United States

In the U.S., popular media and the veterans promoted the Flying Tigers as representatives of the nation and American culture, which also worked to distance the operation (and thus, the

U.S.) from China; this also resulted in the portrayal of the AVG as the only fighting force in China against the Japanese. During the Cold War, veterans and government officials recast the AVG as also an anti-communist group. Moreover, the qualities of “American-ness” highlighted in portrayals of the Flying Tigers reflect a sense of paternalism towards the Chinese.

As the only source of Allied victories until the Battle of Midway, the press latched onto the AVG members and their fiercely designed fighter planes.<sup>3</sup> A newsreel from 1942 points out that when “they aren’t shooting down Japs, the Tigers keep it trim with popular American sports,” presenting the AVG members as representatives of American culture, playing traditional American sports even outside of the country, in times of desperation and high tension.<sup>4</sup> In this clip, the AVG members play a casual game of football, one of the most symbolic examples of American sports. Similarly, in another newsreel from the war years, the narrator states, “Former Army, Navy, Marine officers, transport pilots, they’re the last of the world’s soldiers of fortune. Today, they’re a part of America’s flying forces fighting the battle of China.” With the emphasis on the members as being part of “America’s” forces, the AVG is set up as representatives of America. Within the context of a global war, the trend of governments establishing and promoting a nation’s own identity is understandable. In times of ideological conflict, governments need to assert themselves as a justified power for the public and to their enemies. In this case, the promotion of the Flying Tigers as a uniquely “American” operation and the members as representatives of the U.S. underscores American qualities of democracy, freedom, and honor through World War II and the Cold War.

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<sup>3</sup> Martha Byrd, *Chennault: Giving Wings to the Tiger*, (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1987), 135-136.

<sup>4</sup> Official Films Newsreel, “1942 Vol. 2 FLYING TIGERS, BATTLE OF MIDWAY 8473.” United States, 1942. July 9, 2014. Accessed June 29, 2017.

Some American representation of the Flying Tigers focused solely on Americans as the fighting force, neglecting the roles of Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalist Army in the war. This type of representation detached the Flying Tigers from the Chinese context and thus also distanced the U.S. from China. In a similar vein, in the 1942 film, *Flying Tigers*, discussed in chapter one, one pilot exclaimed, “This is not our home, this is not our fight.” which also indicates to the audience that the Flying Tigers took on (and took over) a “fight” that was not directly related to them. Conversely, the quote also draws a clear distinction between the Flying Tigers, and thus, the U.S., with China by emphasizing that the battle of China is “not our fight,” and China is “not our home.”<sup>5</sup> With these distinctions, the work of the AVG can be perceived as even more admirable and honorable because it is clear they chose to be part of a risky operation for another country and its people. At one point in the film, Woody Jason, who is characterized as the rebellious troublemaker pilot, goes to a local children’s shelter and performs magic for an adoring crowd of children. Scenes like these communicate a sense of U.S. paternalism; not only do these men bravely fight against the Japanese in China, but are also fun, humanitarian, young men, who can bring light and laughter to China.

In the immediate post-war period, U.S.-China relations changed drastically when the Communist Party won the Chinese Civil War and established the People’s Republic of China in 1949, forcing Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists to flee to Taiwan. Although the U.S. never considered Communist China as an official “China,” here were now two nations claiming to be “China,” that were on vastly different sides of the Cold War, and thus had very different

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<sup>5</sup> *Flying Tigers*. Produced by Edmund Grainger, Russell Kimball, Otto Siegel, and Adele Palmer. Directed by David Miller. Performed by John Wayne, John Carroll, Anna Lee, and others. (1942: Los Angeles, Republic Pictures Corporation), online version.

relationships with the United States.<sup>6</sup> A memo from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Secretary of Defense published in 1953 spelled out contrasting treatments of the two nations: China was to be contained and kept out of the United Nations, while the U.S. would continue to support the Nationalists in Taiwan as “the government of China.”<sup>7</sup> Two years later, in 1955, the Vietnam War further antagonized the U.S. and China for the next twenty years, as they were direct enemies in this war. The establishment of the Nationalist government in Taiwan was significant for the memory of the Flying Tigers because the location of the alliance – mainland China – became an enemy of the U.S. while Taiwan, where there had been no U.S. military involvement (and had actually been enemy territory because of Japanese colonization), became an ally after the establishment of the Nationalist government post-1949.

During the Cold War, actors in the U.S. promoted the group not only as symbols of American values but also as anti-communist symbols, to reflect the America’s fierce anti-communist stance during the Cold War. Within this Cold War framework, the strength and superiority of the Flying Tigers implicitly applied to the U.S., as a nation superior to its Communist enemies. In the U.S., the early celebration of the Flying Tigers faded during the war as their acts were overshadowed by other Allied victories. But during the Cold War, the Flying Tigers could be put to work in a way that other U.S. wartime accomplishments could not: as symbols of rogue Americans who had taken on the Communists. This recasting of the Flying Tigers operation as an anti-Communist freedom mission distorted the history. The AVG had been fighting with the Nationalists against the Japanese, not against the Communists in China

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<sup>6</sup> For the rest of this thesis, I will continue using the term “China” to refer to Mainland China, unless referred to differently in quoted primary sources.

<sup>7</sup> Edwin H.J. Carns, No. 145 Memorandum by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Secretary of Defense: NSC 166: U.S. Policy Toward Communist China” (Memorandum, Washington, 1953). And James Peck, *Washington’s China: The National Security World, the Cold War, and the Origins of Globalism*, (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 175.

during the war. Nevertheless, during the Cold War, the Flying Tigers could be deployed as part of an anti-Communist project.

In the 1970s and 1980s, for example, some American political figures worked hard to shift the Flying Tiger story into the service of anti-Communism. William Pawley had been the president of the Central Aircraft Manufacturing Company (CAMCO), but later worked for Truman as his ambassador to Peru in 1945 and then to Brazil in 1948.<sup>8</sup> In 1972, Pawley motivated by his desire to publicize “free China” (Taiwan) at the time of possible rapprochement between the U.S. government and China, began a collaboration with Louis S. Casey, the curator and head of the Smithsonian National Science and Space Museum, to create an exhibit honoring the Flying Tigers. *Flying Tigers: A Selection of Paintings of Members of the American Volunteer Group* by Raymond P.R. Nielson, N.A was on display from October 1972 through the summer of 1973.

1972 marked an important turning point for U.S.-China relations during the Cold War with Nixon’s visit to China. It was the first time the U.S. formally acknowledged China as a legitimate diplomatic power. Pawley and other members of the government who had been closely tied with the Nationalists (known as the “China Hands”), viewed Nixon’s possible establishment of relations with the Communist government with concern, and continued to keep the memory of the collaboration alive.<sup>9</sup> Pawley hoped that putting on an exhibit at the Smithsonian about the Flying Tigers would sway the general public against rapprochement.

The correspondence records make Pawley’s motivations clear. In late April 1971, Pawley wrote to Soong Meiling in Taiwan, requesting that she send the twenty-seven portraits that he

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<sup>8</sup> Anthony R. Carrozza, *William D. Pawley: The Extraordinary Life of the Adventurer, Entrepreneur, and Diplomat Who Cofounded the Flying Tigers*, (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2012), 122.

<sup>9</sup> Daqing Yang, “Entangled Memories: China in American and Japanese Remembrances of World War II” in Marc Gallicchio, ed., *The Unpredictability of the Past* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 290-291.



had commissioned at the end of the war back to America. The portraits were of young AVG members who had lost their lives in China. He explained that he wanted to put on an exhibition with “as much publicity for Free China as can possibly be had at this crucial time.”<sup>10</sup> For Pawley, this exhibit would serve as a way to challenge the idea of détente with China. As he wrote Soong Meiling, “The effort to establish relations with Communist China must be combatted in every manner possible because the American people are truly naïve with references to Red China’s intentions.”<sup>11</sup> For Pawley, remembering the Flying Tigers became a way to remind Americans that the World War II alliance was with the Nationalists and not the Communists, and thus, to discredit the Communists as an illegitimate government.

While Pawley’s correspondence with Soong Meiling and Louis Casey make clear his politics and motivations behind the project, the actual exhibit at the Smithsonian did not necessarily reflect these politics. For example, the exhibit emphasized the Flying Tigers as an American operation by highlighting Chennault and members of the AVG who had been killed in action, with limited acknowledgment of the Chinese Nationalist forces. The exhibit also did not differentiate between the Communists and the Nationalists, nor did it mention any names of Nationalist officials, which was contradictory to Pawley’s original intentions of showcasing the “evils” of the Communists and securing good publicity for Taiwan. This begs the question of whether the non-distinction was deliberate, which seems counter-intuitive for an example of political memory that would have greatly benefited from drawing clear lines between Nationalists and Communists. The exhibition script ends with the line, “Their [the Flying Tigers]

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<sup>10</sup> Correspondence from William D. Pawley to Madame Chiang Kai-shek, 28 April 1971, Accession 11-075 Box 1 Folder 1, National Air and Space Museum, Aeronautics Division Exhibition Records, 1971-1972, Washington DC, USA.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

contribution to the morale of the people of China and the United States can never be measured,” which neglects the international climate by not distinguishing between Taiwan and China.<sup>12</sup>

Instead, this exhibit celebrated America’s role in the Second Sino-Japanese War, effectively erasing the wartime efforts of the Nationalists before and during the Allies joined in on the Pacific theater. This celebration further romanticized the AVG, and also became a space for actors within the U.S. to emphasize characteristics of American national identity. The biggest painting on display showed a somber-looking Chennault, who had passed away fourteen years earlier. The size and tone of his painting as compared to the others subtly communicated that the Flying Tigers was “his” operation, without acknowledging the role of other major players in the operation such as Chiang Kai-shek, T.V. Soong, and the Nationalist Air Force generals. The decision to only display paintings of members of the Flying Tigers who passed away in China – most of whom were killed in combat – elevated the sense of heroism and sacrifice of the men, especially since most of them had been in their early twenties.

In the 1980s, staunch anti-Communist President Ronald Reagan also used the example of the Flying Tigers to promote his agenda. When asked in a 1984 interview about his opinion of U.S. citizens getting involved in military conflicts against communist forces in Central America, Reagan pointed to the precedent established by the Flying Tigers:

Well, I have to say it’s quite in line with what has been a pretty well established tradition in our country...In World War II, we had pilots being recruited to go to the Flying Tigers... But at the same time, as I say, it’s been a tradition, and Americans have always done this. And I would be inclined to not want to interfere with them.<sup>13</sup>

Reagan’s use of the Flying Tigers in this interview suggests the ways in which the AVG could be used as anti-communist symbols of U.S. democracy and tradition.

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<sup>12</sup> “Flying Tigers: A Selection of Paintings of Members of the American Volunteer Group by Raymond P.R. Nielson, N.A.”

<sup>13</sup> Ronald Reagan: "Interview With Representatives of the Scripps-Howard News Service ," October 25, 1984. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*.

While in the 1970s and 80s, the Flying Tigers became useful as part of a political project to foster anti-Communist sentiment, the domestic context shifted in the 1990s as the result of a general resurgence of World War II memory in the United States. With veterans starting to pass away in the 1990s, cultural and political institutions in the U.S. contributed to the memory boom of the late 1990s.<sup>14</sup> The outcome of the Vietnam War and the divisions it created within the society, prompted the government and the public to celebrate World War II (“the good war”) to ideologically re-unify the nation: one that had successfully propelled the U.S. to the status of global leader.<sup>15</sup> Those who had fought in World War II were recognized as “the greatest generation.” The fiftieth anniversary commemorations of the war and the aging population of those who had lived through the war sparked a sense of urgency within the next generation to keep their memories and stories alive.<sup>16</sup>

The resurgence in World War II memory in the 1990s created a new context within which Flying Tiger veterans especially began to promote the memory of the operation. The AVG veterans demanded recognition for their service by publishing memoirs, creating organizations to disseminate information about the group, and organizing reunions. In the case of the Flying Tigers, the veterans were the main force seeking to highlight and promote the memory of the operation.

The 1990s effort by the veterans to tell their own story was not new. The unique-ness of their status – as an unofficial unit – and the collaborative nature of their operation with the Chinese Nationalists, led the U.S. government to not recognize the group as official U.S.

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<sup>14</sup> Emily S. Rosenberg, *A Date Which Will Live: Pearl Harbor in American History*, (Durham N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2005), 125.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

veterans, even though it was iconic in the media.<sup>17</sup> Starting in 1945 with Chennault's memoir, many Flying Tiger veterans and involved members also wrote memoirs. This trend can be inferred as an effort by the veterans to promote their own narrative, to counter the government's refusal to acknowledge them as official veterans. In one of the most public and politicized examples of asserting their memory, the veterans submitted a Bill of Rights request in 1945, urging Congress to recognize the AVG as official U.S. veterans, by citing their contributions to the war effort and direct collaboration with another Allied nation.<sup>18</sup> Even in 1945, the AVG veterans may have already foreseen the operation fading away from popular memory. In the "Letters to the Editors" section of *Life Magazine* in 1964, one person describes the Flying Tigers as "that long forgotten group of the early days after Pearl Harbor" who "fought and died in obsolete aircraft patched together with piano wire and devotion... which thereafter disappeared forever."<sup>19</sup> This strongly worded description explains why the AVG veterans felt the need to self-promote; despite their overwhelming popularity during the early war years, in less than twenty years, they were already written off as "long forgotten" and "obsolete."

Reflecting the same themes of the immediate post-war years, the veterans' portrayal of the operation repurposes the ideals of democracy and freedom from the World War II context of fighting the Battle of China. Beginning in the 1980s, veterans began highlighting themselves and the operation as an "American" one, decontextualized from the Chinese context. In his memoir from 1988, Charles Bond Jr. emphasized that the AVG's efforts had been "for the American

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<sup>17</sup> AVG members were not recognize as official U.S. veterans until 1991, and did not eligible to receive veterans' benefits. See "50 Years Later, Flying Tigers are Given Veterans' Benefits," July 8, 1991, *New York Times*.

<sup>18</sup> AVG Bill of Rights Copy, from the Private Collection of Jose Marcel Panlilio (Published online at <https://flyingtigersavg.com>: September 15, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> Both quotes from Percy Knauth, "Captain Shank's Letters," *LIFE*, May 29, 1964.

cause”<sup>20</sup> and he presented the Chinese as pathetic people in need of American people. He remembered the Chinese streets as “literally jammed with humanity” and of the Chinese people as wearing “dirty and ragged” clothing that he describes as “pitiful.”<sup>21</sup> In Bond’s 1988 memoir, the AVG embodied American values. Likewise, in another memoir by a former AVG pilot, Erik Shilling, his frequent use of the terms, “orientals” and “natives” to refer to the Chinese, also creates divisions between Americans and Chinese people. In describing cultural differences, Shilling writes, “To the Oriental people, *Face* is an important factor in their lives... Americans have the same problem but to a much lesser degree and call it pride.”<sup>22</sup> The delineation in national character from the Chinese notion of “saving face” to what Shilling considers a less problematic American notion of “pride” corresponds with larger domestic trends to distance the AVG, and thus, the U.S. from China. His prose also depicts the AVG as heroic freedom fighters.

In recent years, the portrayal of the Flying Tigers mirrors the way that Pawley portrayed the operation as the sole fighting force against the Japanese in China. The American erasure of the Nationalist war effort parallels the Communist neglect of the Nationalist wartime contribution, and works to uphold the U.S. as an invincible hero of World War II. In the National World War II Museum in New Orleans, Chiang Kai-shek and his generals are not mentioned at all in the Flying Tigers section, and instead the section focuses entirely on the American members. Prose such as the AVG “blunt[ed] the Japanese advance” and “pummeled Japanese transportation routes,” portrays a forceful and strong AVG, and a non-existent Chinese

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<sup>20</sup> Charles R. Bond and Terry Anderson, *A Flying Tiger’s Diary*, (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 1988), 68.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-64.

<sup>22</sup> Erik Shilling, *Destiny: A Flying Tiger’s Rendezvous with Fate*, (self-pub., 1993), 136.

counterpart, despite the fact that the operation was collaborative, and the locals were also heavily involved.<sup>23</sup>

On the U.S. side, from the war years, the establishment of the Flying Tigers as representatives of American culture distanced the operation from China and promoted a narrative of the AVG as the only fighting force against the Japanese in the Battle of China. During the Cold War, the veterans and government officials expanded the symbol of the Flying Tigers to encompass anti-communism. The memory of the Flying Tigers played out differently in China, complicated by the emergence of a distinct vernacular and official narrative due to the change in government in 1949. Like in the case of the U.S., how different actors commemorate the AVG is closely linked with establishing and deploying a national identity.

#### Memory of the Flying Tigers in China

The change in political leadership in China after 1949 affected the official narratives of the war in a way that had a dramatic impact on Chinese representations of the Flying Tigers. With the victory of Mao in China, the key Chinese enemy became the Nationalists in Taiwan. As such, Chinese authorities began to neglect the Nationalists' role in the war, including the resistance to the Japanese military in Southwestern China.<sup>24</sup> During Mao's time, the association of China as a victor in the Anti-Japanese War sought to glorify the Communist Party over the Nationalists and to help the Communist Party gain legitimacy from the public.<sup>25</sup> For the Communist Party, World War II was seen as their path to victory against the Nationalists.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> National World War II Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana, Permanent exhibit.

<sup>24</sup> Rana Mitter, "War and Memory since 1945," *Modern Asian Studies* 45:2 (2011), 550.

<sup>25</sup> Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 102.

<sup>26</sup> Rana Mitter and Aaron William Moore, "China in World War II, 1937–1945: Experience, Memory, and Legacy," *Modern Asian Studies* 45:2 (2011), 227.

This trend was not only understood on an individual level, but also on an institutional level. Publishers understood that they were not to discuss the Second-Sino Japanese War. As a result, veterans of the Nationalist Party were not given space to write or talk about their experiences during the war in any capacity until the 1980s.<sup>27</sup> As British historian, Rana Mitter writes “all mourning for those who had been killed serving in the Nationalist armies of Chiang Kai-shek took place privately, as the official communist narrative removed them from public acknowledgment.”<sup>28</sup> As late as the 1980s, textbooks focused on the Nationalist Party’s corruption and initial non-resistance policy towards the Japanese Imperial military in the 1930s.<sup>29</sup> Textbooks instead taught students that communist troops were solely responsible for the Chinese victory of the Anti-Japanese War, when it was actually the Nationalists who had been the main opponents of the Japanese military.<sup>30</sup> It was not until the 1992 revisions that textbooks gave credit to the Nationalists for their significant role in the Anti-Japanese War.<sup>31</sup>

The effort to erase the Nationalists from popular memory meant that remembering the Flying Tigers was also forbidden. By erasing the Nationalist’s contributions to World War II, the Communist Party also erased the memory and celebration of any collaborations with the Allies, including the Flying Tigers. Eddie Long’s story after the Communists victory in 1949 fits within this general context as agents within the Communist government erased his experience with the U.S. Air Force beyond the physical destroying of evidence. By imprisoning Long and classifying

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>28</sup> Mitter, 548.

<sup>29</sup> Wang, 102.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

him as a traitor, the government attempted to put an end to Long's narrative and others like his, of collaborating with the AVG and thus, the Nationalists.

Despite the government's efforts to repress the history of the Nationalist contribution to the war, and thus, of the Flying Tigers, locals continued to preserve their memory of the group. The revival of memory took on a physical manifestation through the construction and maintaining of graves that local people built for fallen members of the Flying Tigers. These graves were all built in remote areas where the Flying Tigers had fought. Although many were very simple, in light of the communist killings and torture of people who had been affiliated with the Nationalists during the war, creating these memorials and continuing to care for them was a significant defiance of government policies and an important show of appreciation for the AVG.

The work of local groups to preserve the memory of the Flying Tigers in China shows the limits of official narratives, as the story of the contested memorialization of Lieutenant Robert Mooney illustrates. This story is a particularly good example of the divergence between vernacular and official narratives because it showcases how the interplay between the two narratives is ultimately how memories are deployed and sites of memory are created. Although Mooney technically belonged to the 14th Air Force, the locals honored and remembered him as a "Flying Tiger". In 1943, Mooney crash-landed into a remote mountainside to avoid crashing into a town and killing locals in the process. The locals were extremely moved by his act of sacrifice to save them and their town, and built a monument to honor him in May 1943.<sup>32</sup> During the Cultural Revolution, in order to erase markers of past relations with the West, Mao's Red Guards tore down monuments that had been built for fallen AVG members. Mooney's monument still

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<sup>32</sup> Long, 175.



survives today because the locals buried the pieces during this political movement.<sup>33</sup> In 1992, on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mooney's death, the Xiangyun county government rebuilt the monument. A Chinese documentary produced in 2014 by the public provincial channel Yunnan TV, "Flying Tigers, The Legendary Cowboys" films the locals of Xiangyun county paying respects to Mooney's monument. The voiceover tells us "Every April [for *Qingmingjie*, a holiday to pay respects to your ancestors], the residents will go to a small mountain by the county to honor and commemorate Robert Mooney."<sup>34</sup> Although the Communist government strongly condemned the memory of anything to do with the West and the Nationalists, these locals continued to tend to his grave, while risking the possibility of facing severe consequences if they were caught. The continuation of this local commemoration of Mooney from 1943 despite government policies indicates a divide in official and vernacular memory. In the Chinese case, regardless of the shifts in the government's stance on the Nationalists and the West, local attitudes toward the Flying Tigers remained consistent.

Since the late 1980s, Chinese World War II memory has shifted in different ways. The narratives and stories of the Nationalists have been inserted into national World War II memory. In the 1980s, the Chinese government's desire to reconnect with Taiwan, as well as the widespread distrust in Maoism after the Cultural Revolution, changed the official narrative of history domestically.<sup>35</sup> A new wave of remembrance prompted a movement of a more "unbiased" history: which meant a history that included Chiang Kai-shek and the victories of the

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<sup>33</sup> Daniel Jackson, *The Forgotten Squadron: the 449th Fighter Squadron in World War II: Flying P-38s Over China with the Flying Tigers, 14th Air Force* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Military History, 2010), 9.

<sup>34</sup> "Flying Tigers, The Legendary Cowboys" (*Feihu Chuanqi Zhi Hui Fei de Niuzai*) <飞虎传奇之会飞的牛仔>. 云南卫视. 2014.

<sup>35</sup> Mitter, 550.

Nationalists in Chinese World War II history.<sup>36</sup> This shift in war memory prompted the Communist government to re-incorporate the Flying Tigers into popular memory through textbooks, museums and popular media.

At the same time the Chinese government became more active in using museums and public monuments as part of a patriotic education campaign.<sup>37</sup> As a result, especially in the post-1990s period, the Flying Tigers operation has been reinserted into official Chinese World War II history and memory through the expansion of the official narrative to co-opt the experiences and wartime victories of the Nationalists. Museums in China do not distinguish between China and Taiwan, or the Communists and Nationalists, as if there was no conflict or even differentiation between the two governments.

The Kunming Flying Tigers Museum does not distinguish between the Communists and the Nationalists in the exhibition script, only referring to the Nationalist military using the generic term, “Chinese military.”<sup>38</sup> Moreover, on a panel labeled “Emerging at a Historic Moment,” which displays important figures of the operation, only Chennault, Pang-Tsu Mow (director of the Nationalist Aviation Committee), T.V. Soong, and Former President Roosevelt are featured.<sup>39</sup> The face of the Nationalist Party, Chiang Kai-shek, is not displayed on this panel, nor is he mentioned at all throughout the entire exhibit. By leaving out Chiang Kai-shek, the narrative not only erases the divide between the Communists and the Nationalists, but also diminishes the role of the nationalists. The same goes for the Flying Tigers Heritage Park in

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<sup>36</sup> Wang, 102.

<sup>37</sup> Wang, 114-116.

<sup>38</sup> Kunming Flying Tigers Museum (*Kunming Feihudui Jinianguan*) <昆明飞虎队纪念馆> Yunnan, China. Permanent museum. 2016.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

Guilin; any time the script refers to what should be the Nationalist military, the museum uses generalized, and unspecific terms: “Chinese military” or “Chinese Air Force,” making it unclear which military the script is referring to, much less that there were not only two different Chinese militaries, but that they were in intense conflict with each other.<sup>40</sup> The government’s appropriation of the Nationalist’s military strength and contributions in the Anti-Japanese War, as their own victory, suggests the Communist government’s confidence in its own legitimacy, and a desire to reconnect with the Taiwanese Nationalist government towards a “One China” principle. Likewise, the newly renovated Republic of China (R.O.C) Air Force Museum in Taiwan discusses the aviation history of China without differentiating between China and Taiwan.<sup>41</sup> Most telling is that the museum does not mention the Chinese Civil War at all. After discussing the Chinese American Composite Wing of the 14th Air Force (1943-1945), the exhibit jumps to 1949, skipping over the Chinese Civil War.

Contemporary Chinese museums use the narrative of the Flying Tigers to assert China as a strong contributor in the Allied victory of World War II. Museum narratives tend to focus on the composite wings of the subsequent 14<sup>th</sup> Air Force, which included Chinese fighter pilots and mechanics. In the U.S., any unit deployed after the Flying Tigers as part of the official Air Force is not considered a “Flying Tiger,” However, in China, the membership of the Flying Tigers has been expanded to include any fighter pilot or crewman who were part of the U.S. operation, including U.S.-trained Chinese pilots and engineers. The inclusion of Chinese pilots and engineers within the category of the “Flying Tigers” allows for the assertion of Chinese agency, rather than just a story about being saved by Americans.

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<sup>40</sup> Flying Tiger Heritage Park (*Guilin Feihudui Yizhi Gongyuan*) 桂林飞虎队遗址公园 Guangxi, China. 2015.

<sup>41</sup> The R.O.C. Air Force Museum (*Kongjun Junshiguan*) <空軍軍事館> Kaohsiung, Taiwan, 1983, renovated and reopened in 2017.

Furthermore, the combination of emphasizing the efforts of the Composite Wing with the erasure of the Communist-Nationalist divide, the Flying Tigers becomes an avenue through which the Chinese can assert themselves as a strong ally in the global anti-fascist struggle, rather than a forgotten theater of World War II. The “Heroes of the Flying Tigers” Exhibit in the *JianChuan* Museum Cluster in Anren, Sichuan province is especially revealing in terms of how the exhibit promotes the memory of the Flying Tigers. The first big plaque indicates that this is “The Hall of the American Army’s Contribution to the Anti-Japanese War.”<sup>42</sup> By indicating that the museum is dedicated to Americans who “contributed” to the “Anti-Japanese War,” the caption both inserts the Battle of China as a part of the global conflict rather than a war that only concerns China, and positions the U.S. as an equal ally. The term, “Anti-Japanese War,” commonly used in China to refer to the Second Sino-Japanese War, consciously inserts this war into global World War II narratives, by indicating that China fought against Japan, a common enemy shared with the Allies. Rather than a term such as the “Battle of China” which localizes the conflict to China, and minimizes the scale of the war to a “battle.”

The Chinese government also equalizes the U.S.-Chinese cooperation and upholds itself as a strong contributor to World War II through textbooks. In one of the most commonly used textbooks in China, the “The People’s” (*Renmin*) high school textbook, the text mentions the U.S. only to say in vague terms that the U.S. “supported” China in its Anti-Japanese War, officially entered the war after Pearl Harbor, and dropped two atomic bombs on Japan in 1945, effectively ending the war.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the victories of the Chinese Nationalist military are written about in the chapter dedicated to “Progression of the Global Anti-Fascist War,” which

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Wen Liu, “A Comparative Study on the ‘Anti-Japanese War’ Between the Mainland China and Taiwan High School History Textbooks” (Ph.D diss., Hebei Shifan University, 2015), 4, 31. Translation by author.

contextualizes and inserts the Anti-Japanese War into the broader World War II history.<sup>44</sup>

Likewise, a caption from the Flying Tigers Heritage Park written about the Composite Wing reads, “AVG, CATF [Chinese American Task Force], 14 AF [Air Force], CACW [Chinese American Composite Wing] had been commanded by Chennault and maintained the team badge, plane badge, style and tactic of Flying Tigers. People called these four teams Flying Tigers.”<sup>45</sup>

The caption deliberately presents the Composite Wing as being similar to the AVG, with the same commander, insignia and tactics, and tries to establish the unit as one that deserves the label, “Flying Tiger,” by claiming that all four of these units were referred to in the same way.

This chapter examined how the memory of the Flying Tigers has been instrumentalized by different actors, including the veterans and Chinese locals who were directly involved, the national governments and popular media, in both the U.S. and China from the war years through the present to assert characteristics of national identity in conjunction with the changing international landscape. In the case of America, the Flying Tigers became a symbol for traditional U.S. values of honor, and especially during the Cold War, they also become a symbol of anti-communism. Meanwhile, in China, official World War II memory underwent drastic changes due to the Communist takeover in 1949, causing the Flying Tigers to be left out of public narratives, but commemorated locally. More recently, the Flying Tigers have become a way through which the Chinese can assert their own agency, and what they see as the significant role they played within the larger World War II context. Memory scholars agree on the integral nature of collective memory as a foundation in nation building.<sup>46</sup> As to how nations build a collective memory, Wang contends that all nation states focus on teaching national history with

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<sup>44</sup> Original text: 世界反法西斯战争的发展. Liu, 5. Translation by author.

<sup>45</sup> Flying Tiger Heritage Park.

<sup>46</sup> Wang, 95.

“the aim of consolidating the bond between the individual citizen and the homeland.”<sup>47</sup> While this chapter did not focus exclusively on the education systems of both nations, it is clear throughout the chapter that World War II remains a significant part of official and vernacular memory and that it has been taught or communicated through mediums such as popular media, public speeches, museums and online forums. Ultimately, the tropes of wartime memory highlight the core qualities of national identity that are repurposed through different domestic and international conflicts.

The next chapter will explore how China and the U.S. have reflected on the transnational collaboration, in which there is an emphasis on the strong friendship and alliance between the locals and the Flying Tiger members. The chapter explores how themes of U.S. superiority have lasted through the contemporary period in both domestic and collaborative sites of memory, but have shifted in the 2000s to portray the operation in a more equal light. Therefore, the Flying Tigers have become a model for present and future U.S.-China friendships, even as diplomatic relations between the two states remains tense.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

### Chapter Three: Reflection of Transnational Collaboration

In 2015, the Flying Tiger Heritage Park in Guilin, Guangxi Province opened with great fanfare after approximately ten years of planning and organizing. Participants and invited guests included 91 year-old Flying Tiger veteran Jay Venyared; Flying Tigers Historical Organization Chairman Major General James Whitehead; the vice premier of the State Council of China, Liu Yandong; Cynthia Chennault and Nell Calloway, Claire Chennault's daughter and granddaughter respectively; and 100 family members of Flying Tiger veterans.<sup>1</sup> The planning process had started in 2006, when Major General Whitehead urged the Chinese government to consider restoring Chennault's Command Cave in Guilin to its original form as a joint American and Chinese project. As the plans were expanded upon, the organizers decided to add a memorial plaza and museum to the park, for which the Chinese government agreed to donate land and funds.<sup>2</sup>

Besides the Flying Tigers Historical Organization, which was in charge of the collaboration, other members of the U.S. government and military contributed to the project in a way that highlights how the Flying Tigers continue to be an emblem of friendship to both nations. As the initial construction got underway in 2010, Flying Tigers Historical Organization president Larry Jobe remarked, "America and China stood together in battle. Today we stand together again in cooperation and friendship to recognize those veterans who fought and died to preserve our freedom."<sup>3</sup> From Major General Whitehead's initial request to the Chinese authorities, to the mission statement of the Organization as "the premier non-profit preserving

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<sup>1</sup> Flying Tigers Memorial Museum Guilin in China (<美国飞虎队桂林纪念馆> , Guangxi, China. Permanent museum, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Flying Tiger Delegation Awarded Congressional Recognition," Flying Tiger Historical Organization, accessed July 12, 2017, <https://www.flyingtigershistoricalorganization.com/history.html>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

the shared history, sacrifices, and heroics between the American and Chinese people during World War II,” the organizers emphasized the themes of friendship and cooperation. These collaborative efforts between the U.S. and China in creating sites of memory are new and unique to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While the themes in these sites of memory, such as that of the grateful Chinese, U.S. paternalism and superiority, have largely remained the same, portrayals of the operation have shifted towards depicting a more balanced partnership from the 2000s.

The emergence of more equalizing sites of memory worked to establish the Flying Tigers as a model for present and future collaboration between American and Chinese people regardless of state relations, through the emphasis of friendship between the AVG members and Chinese locals. This chapter will explore how the transnational nature of the alliance has been evaluated and reflected upon from the 1940s, and how the narrative has been repurposed to promote national identities and international agendas. Contemporary narratives consistently utilize the friendship between the locals and the Flying Tigers as a model for future transnational alliances. Scholars of transnational memory focus on war memory as a vehicle through which nations can reach reconciliation. Within this framework, using the memory of the Flying Tigers to promote reconciliation is fitting because the operation itself was a collaboration that both nations can celebrate.

Popular media portrayals in the U.S. of the Flying Tigers during the early war years paint a positive picture of China but in a way that set up a stark dichotomy between the two nations, making clear that the U.S. was superior. Frank Capra’s famous seven-film documentary series, *Why We Fight*, reflects this trend in the United States in the way that the film discusses China as an orientalized, ancient and stagnant country, although also one with a very rich culture, peace-loving people and advanced technology. The documentary reflected early U.S. government



attempts to justify an alliance with China to the public, but in a romanticized and paternalistic way. The documentary draws on specific perceived qualities of China and the Chinese people: how “ancient” the country is, how surprisingly “civilized” it is, and the pacifism of the people. In describing China to the American public, the narrator states, “More than 4,000 years ago, the Chinese empire was already in existence, and more important, so was the Chinese civilization. A civilization of art, of learning, and peace.”<sup>4</sup> The documentary continues to introduce China and the Chinese people in a formulaic way. To justify the U.S. alliance with China, the documentary highlights several generalized qualities of the people, such as their technological innovations as people who, “developed the art of printing for movable type...[and] were among the first astronomers”;<sup>5</sup> and their pacifism as people who “have never waged a war of conquest” in 4,000 years of history.<sup>6</sup>

This new American framing of China as a worthy ally with a rich and peaceful history was necessary at the time, and the Flying Tigers became a symbol through which the U.S. government could justify this alliance. The narrator admits, China “was until recently, a land with which few of us concerned ourselves. But now a great change has taken place. China is now our fighting ally, or more accurately, we are China’s.”<sup>7</sup> Correspondingly, William Grieve, a retired colonel from the Marine Corps contends that while there was some sympathy for China among the American public in the early years of the war, isolationism was still a more popular

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<sup>4</sup> *The Battle of China, Why We Fight*. Directed by Frank Capra and Anatole Litvak. United States: Army Pictorial Service, Signal Corps, 1944.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

option; the U.S. had never treated China as a friend.<sup>8</sup> The development of promoting China as a technological innovator whose inventions were beneficial to the west, and potentially had a lot to offer to America, was a relatively new phenomenon. This attitude towards China and the Chinese people played into the discussion of the Flying Tigers in popular media because they were the link between the two nations at this time, and were the symbols of this complex alliance.

The portrayal of China as “ancient,” and the people as laborers, served the U.S. purpose well, as a way to highlight the strength, superiority, and central role of the Americans in the Battle of China. The narrator in one newsreel from 1943 states, “The oldest and the youngest of the world’s great nations, together with the British Commonwealth, fight side by side in the struggle that is as old as China herself,” as if the ancient country of China needed the help of a young, strong nation such as the United States.<sup>9</sup> The United States portrayed itself, by contrast, as “the youngest of the world’s great nations,” a position it would emphasize even more as it assumed world leadership in the aftermath of World War II. The newsreel from 1943 describes the Battle of China as, “The struggle of freedom against slavery, civilization against barbarism, good against evil. Upon their victory, depends the future of mankind.”<sup>10</sup> The cinematography and rhetoric of the newsreels show the Americans on the front line of the battle while portraying the Chinese as laborers who worked to assist their American saviors.

The portrayal of AVG members from the 1940s continue to persist in the 2010s, even in a collaborative site of memory between Chinese and American organizations. In the early 2000s, Zhang Dongpan – a veteran of the Communist People’s Liberation Army – and John Easterbrook

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<sup>8</sup> William G. Grieve, *The American Military Mission to China, 1941-1942: Lend-Lease Logistics, Politics and the Tangles of Wartime Cooperation*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014), 9.

<sup>9</sup> “Flying Tigers Come to the Defense of China.” Flying Tigers Historical Organization. December 30, 2010. Accessed June 28, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

– a retired U.S. Army Colonel and grandson of General Joseph Stilwell – worked together to curate what would become *National Memories: U.S.-China Collaboration During WWII*, a collaborative exhibit involving eleven partner organizations from China, the U.S. and Hong Kong. The traveling exhibit started in Shenzhen, China, and traveled through various cities in China, Taiwan, and the U.S. The brochure explains that the “exhibit will also present images of soldiers, medics and civilians - the many unsung heroes from both countries who were united in a valiant cause,” vowing to highlight important contributors of the operation whose narratives have often been buried.<sup>11</sup> The vice chairman of the China Overseas Exchange Association noted in response to *National Memories* that “We will never forget the friendship, the support, the assistance given to us at the critical moment in the history of China... I think this built a good foundation...for our future partnership, future collaboration.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, the exhibit establishes itself as a strong proponent of this wartime friendship. The notion of using the friendship between the locals and the Flying Tigers as a model for future transnational alliances is a consistent part of contemporary narratives, and is the piece of the collaborative narrative that can be used to promote U.S.-Chinese reconciliation.

Although photographs have not traditionally been used as primary sources in the field of history, these photos and the *National Memories* exhibit in particular, are a fitting source for this project because while they were taken during the war, the photos have been re-used in this recent exhibit, demonstrating that institutions and people in the contemporary period are not contesting the themes emphasized in the photos, or are recasting these images to promote new ideas. We can see conflict in the exhibit: although the organizers of the exhibit aim to portray the operation

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<sup>11</sup> Pacific Aviation Museum Pearl Harbor, *National Memories: U.S.-China Collaboration During WWII* Brochure, (2015).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

in a much more equal light than has been understood in the past, the paternalistic imagery still seems to serve the U.S. rather than the Chinese. In this way, the bi-national relationship is still tilted, as it was during the war. As a primary source, photographs are useful because as museum studies scholar Paul Williams argues, while they are often viewed as transparent sources, there are silences to unpack.<sup>13</sup> What is included and excluded, and the composition of the image, can all reveal the photographers' biases, as well as the social trends when the photo was taken. As such, photographs in general, but especially those that are exhibited in the contemporary period, are particularly revealing of how narratives of the Flying Tigers have changed or remained the same over time.

While more recent representations of the Flying Tigers, like *National Memories*, do showcase a more equal collaboration, the same undertones of unequal power relationships between the U.S. and China still persist. One of the most iconic photos of the alliance entitled, "A Light of Friendship in Liberated Tengchong,"<sup>14</sup> features an elderly Chinese local and a young American serviceman sharing a light for a cigarette. Although it is an intimate photo of camaraderie, the body language connotes a strong sense of distance and difference. The American is much taller, gently placing his hand against the Chinese man's chest, as if to maintain a distance while getting a light. The American's eyes are closed, contributing to a relative perception of relaxation, whereas the Chinese man is on guard; he is staring straight past his American counterpart. His furrowed brow illustrates a sense of cautiousness. Both are wearing outfits that are representative of their respective countries: a casual but pressed American military uniform and a recognizably traditional Chinese hat and shirt tattered with dirt

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<sup>13</sup> Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (New York: Oxford International Publishers, 2007), 53.

<sup>14</sup> See Appendix I, Figure 10.

stains. The wrinkles in the Chinese man's face, the strained muscles in his neck, and his hollowed out cheeks, contrasted with the American's relaxed facial expression and solid physique illustrates the disparity in financial and military strength between the two countries. The photo also plays up the imagery of China as an ancient nation, and the U.S. as a young, strong nation, similar to the newsreels discussed earlier in the chapter.

Likewise, some photos emphasize the superiority of the U.S. through paternalistic imagery toward the Chinese. In another photo displayed in *National Memories* with the caption, "1st Lt. Chester T. McGraw, Seattle, Washington explaining football to a group of Chinese soldiers,"<sup>15</sup> a Chinese soldier and the American lieutenant are surrounded by a group of smiling Chinese soldiers. As the only American in the photo and the association of football with American culture, the lieutenant is depicted as the representative, or even ambassador, of the United States. Although the photo is not necessarily focused on him, his outfit and obvious difference in race and stature immediately catches the viewer's eye. The lieutenant is relaxed and smiling at the soldier, while the soldier is tense, eyes focused straight ahead in squat position. The disparities in stature and expression in the photograph, and the lieutenant's hand on the soldier's shoulder, create a father-son moment that emphasizes the Chinese as needing the guidance of the U.S. as a more knowledgeable entity. On the other hand, the use of football imagery, and the portrayal of the benevolent relationship between the lieutenant and the Chinese soldier, communicates to the audience that the Chinese can adapt to American culture, perhaps playing into the trope of Chinese Americans as "good" Asians in the U.S. (juxtaposed with Japanese Americans after Pearl Harbor).

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<sup>15</sup> See Appendix I, Figure 11.

An untitled photo that was also displayed in *National Memories* highlights another example of the operation as an unequal collaboration.<sup>16</sup> The photo depicts two long lines of Chinese locals pulling a stone-roller, with a U.S. fighter plane flying over them. The fact that both China and the U.S. are represented in the same photo through the locals and the fighter plane, and are in close proximity, emphasizes the collaborative aspect of the alliance. However, the imagery of Chinese laborers who are indistinguishable from one another as opposed to the single American plane that is flying over them, illustrates the superiority of the United States. Although these photos were taken during the war, the fact that these photos were chosen and exhibited to be in *National Memories* approximately seventy years later in a collaborative traveling exhibit involving people from the U.S., China, and Hong Kong, exemplifies that to a certain extent these tropes are still prevalent, or at least present, in the contemporary era, across the two nations.

Another theme that was common in the war years that carries through to recent sites of memory is that of the “grateful Chinese people.” This framing perpetuates notions of U.S. paternalism and characterizes the Chinese people as helpless victims who were saved by the Flying Tigers, discounting Nationalist wartime efforts like we saw in Chinese museum narratives from the previous chapter. In an example from a 1942 newsreel, the narrator exclaims, “With flags and souvenirs, a grateful Chinese people pay simple tribute to the airmen who have done so much to clear the skies over their embattled land.”<sup>17</sup> Not only are the Flying Tigers here heroicized as people who have “cleared” the skies for the Chinese, the association of the Flying Tigers and “clear skies” is juxtaposed with the pairing of the Chinese people and “their embattled land.” The dichotomy sets up the Flying Tigers as a group bringing freedom to China,

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<sup>16</sup> See Appendix I, Figure 12.

<sup>17</sup> United Newsreel, “Flying Tigers Joins U.S. Air Force in China (1942),” April 29, 2011. Accessed June 28, 2017.

while the Chinese have little agency. A panel of Chennault and the AVG members at the entrance of the Flying Tigers Heritage Park Museum in Guilin exhibits the same trope.<sup>18</sup> The American men are on one side, standing tall and holding the flowers that were presumably given to them by the locals, while the Chinese people are on the other side, cheering and dancing with flowers and baskets of fruit. It is important to recognize the morale-boosting effect of the Flying Tigers and their military accomplishments, and yet, to continuously portray the Chinese people as simply being appreciative of the AVG minimizes the active role of the Chinese locals in the operation, and the Nationalist wartime efforts against the Japanese.

The upholding of U.S. supremacy through recycled paternalistic imagery also serves the Chinese purpose in different ways. Considering that the tropes discussed thus far have portrayed the U.S. in a superior light, it is worth questioning why the Chinese would also be willing to deploy the same tropes. The presence of long-lasting themes of U.S. supremacy, and the romanticization of the AVG in collaborative and Chinese sites of memory is thought provoking. Why would Chinese sites of memory also be engaged in promoting, or at least incorporating, themes that could hint at their own subjugation? For China, the romanticized portrayal of the AVG allows China to assert themselves into the global World War II narrative as a strong ally through the co-opting of the Nationalist victories in the war against Japan (and thus, not distinguishing between the Nationalists and Communists) and through the celebration of the locals who were part of the operation. The promotion of the Flying Tigers with particular motifs of U.S. paternalism can also be seen as a way for China to conversely exhibit its own self-worth by upholding the United States. If a country that was superior to China was willing to come and save the country, and develop close relations with the locals, China also seems like an important

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<sup>18</sup> See Appendix I, Figure 13.

nation. By showing that China was important to the U.S., the Chinese government is able to elevate its status in the international realm. Lastly, the wartime portrayal of China in relation to the U.S. exemplifies how far China has come since the 1940s. Especially when juxtaposed with current day China, the stark contrast in lifestyles and standards of living is undeniable. By forcing the viewer to compare China then and China now, the portrayals of wartime China provokes a reflection of how much the nation has evolved. In this way, these images counterintuitively serve the Chinese government well, to promote China as a strong, rapidly evolving nation.

Contrary to the common portrayal of the minimal role of the Chinese people within the context of the Flying Tigers and their work in China, since the immediate postwar period to the 1980s, and then again in the 2000s, the AVG veterans (and their family members) have emphasized the integral nature of the Chinese locals to the operation. Memoirs by veterans, recent documentaries, museums, and even political speeches have been much more conscious about highlighting the collaborative nature and friendship between the AVG members and the locals. As Flying Tiger pilot, Erik Shilling, explained in the documentary *Wings Over China: The Story of the Flying Tigers in China*, “The Chinese would do wonders with airplanes, repairing them and patching battle damage and things like that.”<sup>19</sup> In the same documentary, Robert ‘Catfish’ Raines, another pilot of the AVG, similarly says, “I don’t think [they got] the recognition that they deserved. If it hadn’t been for them we would have been out of business in a couple of days. Those guys worked day and night... to keep the airplanes in the air.”<sup>20</sup> Eddie Long, the Chinese 14th Air Force pilot discussed in the previous chapter, quotes Chennault

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<sup>19</sup> *Wings over China: The Story of the Flying Tigers in China, China’s Forgotten War*, Directed by Susan Yu, Produced by Susan Yu, 1999, Accessed June 10, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



recognizing the contributions of the Chinese mechanics during which he said, “Without the Chinese mechanics’ enthusiasm and talent, almost half of the flights of the Flying Tigers would have been impossible,” and “the mechanics’ contributions were as significant as the fighting pilots.”<sup>21</sup> The success of the AVG was contingent, in short, depending on the work of the locals.

In later years, AVG veterans recalled and emphasized their friendship and feeling of mutual respect with the local Chinese people on the ground. In his memoir, Colonel Robert Lee Scott Jr., writes, “As we drove along the roads in our jeeps to the field for the alert of the “Jin-bao,” the little children would hold their thumbs up and call again and again, “*Dinghao* (Great!).”<sup>22</sup> As this quote from Scott indicates, the Flying Tigers were famous especially within the local communities where they were based. In a province where most people had never been outside of their local communities, and thus, did not have any exposure to the outside world, the fact that children were comfortable enough to call out to these foreigners exemplifies the sense of friendship born out of the alliance. In *Touching the Tigers: Glen Beneda*, an English documentary produced in China, the narrator explains, “Glen Beneda often said, ‘Without [the] Chinese people’s help, I could not have had this family.’ He would never forget the farmers and soldiers who had rescued him.”<sup>23</sup> In Beneda’s story especially, there is a strong sense of mutual respect and appreciation; Beneda credits his Chinese rescuers with his ability to live the rest of his life. He was able to go back to China after the war: the documentary focuses on two visits in particular. The first was when he was invited back with many other Flying Tiger veterans for the

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<sup>21</sup> Both quotes from Eddie Long, *Hero of the Himalayas: The Life and Memoirs of a Chinese Flying Tiger* (喜馬拉雅的英雄), (Outskirts Press, 2014), 185. Translation by author.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Lee Scott, *God is My Co-Pilot*, (United States: Buckeye Aviation Book Co, 1989), 187.

<sup>23</sup> Xiaolin Li, *Touching the Tigers: Glen Beneda*, online version, directed by Yue Hua (2011), documentary.

60th anniversary of the end of World War II.<sup>24</sup> The second was in 2010. Aware that he did not have much time left, he went back to China with his family to thank the Chinese people, hoping that his family would remain “friends with the Chinese people for many generations.”<sup>25</sup> In terms of continuing on the legacy of friendship and alliance between the AVG and locals, the Beneda case is one example of a contemporary site of memory that emphasizes the friendship between the locals and AVG members.

The friendship between the locals and the Flying Tigers has been cited as the primary reason for remembering the Flying Tigers in the present. When former President Clinton visited China in 1998, he spoke of the Flying Tigers as a model of future U.S.-China collaboration. In an interview with the public channel, China Central Television (CCTV), he commented, “After many years and generations, the story of Colonel C.L. Chennault and the Flying Tigers team tells us that China and America had a proud historical moment together, it inspires us to carry on the tradition of our two countries’ collaboration... This is a story that expresses mutual trust and respect between the Chinese and Americans.”<sup>26</sup> To Clinton, the Flying Tigers embodied an alliance that he saw as something that could and should be repeated in the future. By discussing the “mutual trust and respect” between the two peoples, he avoided speaking of U.S. superiority, paternalism, and Chinese inferiority, and instead focused on presenting an equal relationship.

The trend of highlighting the collaborative nature of the alliance, and presenting it in a more equal light is unique to the 2000s, in both countries. *Touching the Tigers: Glen Beneda*, ends with a quote from George H.W. Bush that also avoids drawing lines between the Chinese and Americans, but rather focuses on the strong friendship that came out of the alliance. In an

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Long, xiii.

interview in 2011 he said, “The Chinese were wonderful in doing this, the rescuing of people. And so I think there’s a message for it. But I think our relationship now with China is such that it has gone past any individual... It’s built on a foundation of, I hope, trust, and a mutual congeniality.”<sup>27</sup> By differentiating between U.S.-Chinese relations during the war and in 2011, George H.W. Bush implies that regardless of state relations during the war, the actions of the Chinese people and the outcome of the alliance have played a part in building the “foundation of trust and mutual congeniality” that he saw as characterizing U.S.-Chinese relations in 2011. In 2005, on the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II, the President of China at the time, Hu Jintao, commented, “We will not forget the Flying Tigers team who fought together with our Chinese troops, shipped strategic material for China, and opened the Hump Aviation line under great risk.”<sup>28</sup> Although the tone of Hu’s comment is appreciative, he still highlights the collaborative nature of the alliance, by recognizing the specific roles of the Flying Tigers but also mentioning them as having “fought together” with the Chinese troops.

Similar to how many of the comments made by political figures underscore the Flying Tigers as a model for a future U.S.-China friendship, contemporary sites of public memory also celebrate the transnational friendships that came out of this alliance. The Flying Tigers U.S. Organization, the organization that was heavily involved in the Flying Tigers Heritage Park in Guilin, writes on their website, “the Flying Tiger Historical Park will be a place where our two great nations and people can come together to remember and honor the past while working for a bright and peaceful future.”<sup>29</sup> There is a conscious effort to equate the two states as the “two great nations.” The idea of using the history of the alliance to promote friendship in the future is

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<sup>27</sup> *Touching the Tigers: Glen Beneda.*

<sup>28</sup> Long, xii.

<sup>29</sup> "Flying Tigers Historical Park in Guilin China," Flying Tigers US, February 13, 2011, accessed June 10, 2017.

a common theme during the contemporary period; it is especially evident when the description of the Heritage Park ends with the line, “honoring past friendships by strengthening future relationships.”<sup>30</sup> A documentary about a Flying Tiger reunion in 2013, produced by Hong Kong Phoenix TV, emphasizes, “This [the alliance] is the best symbol of friendship between China and the U.S. They quickly passed away but we must make the history preserved,” a quote by Chinese scholar Professor Zhou.<sup>31</sup> The narrator also points out that Chennault’s tombstone in Arlington National Cemetery is partly written in Chinese, as the only tombstone with Chinese characters in all of Arlington cemetery.<sup>32</sup> Chennault’s bilingual tombstone is an acknowledgment of Chennault’s integral role not only for the U.S. military but also for the Chinese. Although the AVG was not Chennault’s only project in China during the war, it is one that he has been mostly closely associated with. And thus, his bilingual tombstone is a symbol of the recognized significance of both the Flying Tigers within the U.S. military, and of China within the U.S. war narrative.

The friendship between the locals and the AVG members is consistently used as a model for present and future alliances between the two nations. In the Flying Tiger Heritage Park, the final section of the museum is entitled “Friendship Everlasting.” The section details how the Flying Tigers have continued to bring together the two nations by way of memory preservation through the construction of this Heritage Park. On a panel entitled, “Reopen a Door for Friendship,” photos of Chen Xiangmei, as Reagan’s ambassador, visiting with Deng Xiaoping are displayed. The section emphasizes another chance at friendship between the people of the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> *The Last Reunion of the Flying Tigers*, documentary, reported by Bingru Wang (2013, Hong Kong Phoenix Satellite TV), online version. Although produced in Hong Kong, there is an English voiceover throughout the documentary.

<sup>32</sup> See Appendix I, Figure 14.

two nations by establishing the Flying Tigers as the first instance of friendship, and this 1980 moment as a second example of friendship.

This third chapter examined how both nations have reflected upon the transnational nature of the Flying Tigers operation from the war years through the present. The same themes highlighting the superiority of the U.S. have continued to remain even in contemporary sites of memory, and yet, there has been a shift toward portraying the collaboration in a more equal light compared to the past. Like Eddie Long's experience with being celebrated and treated as an enemy, or the repurposed symbolism of the Flying Tigers during the Cold War era, the shifts in imagery here and the emergence of collaborative sites of memory reflect the ebb and flow of U.S.-Chinese relations. As China has started rising as a global power and the U.S. has had to grapple with this shift in the global order, the portrayal of the alliance has tilted towards a more equalized alliance. Moreover, the memory of the Flying Tigers, a collaboration in which both the U.S. and China can be seen in a positive light, has become an avenue through which both nations, or at least the people, can reflect on and foresee a friendship in the future despite tense state relations.

## Conclusion

In this thesis I have thematically organized the evolving memory of the Flying Tigers in both the U.S. and China into three sections: the construction of a romanticized narrative, the instrumentalization of their story to promote political agendas domestically and internationally, and the reflection of the transnational nature of the operation. While the three stages of the process have diverged between the two nations, the coexistence of even contradictory narratives over time highlights both the power and limitations of all actors in this story: governments and militaries, popular media, and the individuals (veterans and locals). And thus, this study sheds light on the interplays between official and vernacular narratives, and the process of memory creation within and across nations.

In thinking about why and how memories are created, promoted, or neglected, the story of the Flying Tigers also is a window into the intimate link between wartime memories and national identity. Why is it that the Flying Tigers have remained so important for both the U.S. and China almost eighty years despite only being in operation for seven months? The story of the Flying Tigers is successful because it allows everyone involved, from the veterans and locals, to the Nationalist, Communist and U.S. governments, to find a way to depict themselves favorably. On the vernacular level, the veterans can popularize themselves as proud representatives of America, volunteering to fight on behalf of another country and its people; the locals become a celebrated part of this transnational collaboration because of the sacrifices they made to protect and assist the AVG members. On the national level, the operation has been a way to promote specific values: for the U.S., the portrayal of the AVG has communicated themes of U.S. superiority, democracy, and masculinity. For China, the collaboration has been used to highlight both Chinese agency during the war and became a space through which the government could

promote an image of a united China. As Zheng Wang and many scholars of historical memory have argued, historical memory is one of the foundations of building a nation.<sup>1</sup> In the post-war period, the U.S. and China underwent contrasting paths: the U.S. came out of the war with confirmation that its values of democracy and freedom proved victorious, while China fell into a four year civil war that would require the establishment of new narratives and values. And thus, for the U.S., the narrative of the war became more about sustaining U.S. values that had already been proven victorious, whereas the Chinese government had to reconstruct wartime narratives while rebuilding a nation. Within the context of evolving U.S.-Chinese relations during the immediate postwar period and through the Cold War, the search for uniquely “American” or “Chinese” national qualities directly influenced how governments and popular media framed the Flying Tigers.

How nations define themselves informs how nations view and interact with one another, especially during times of conflict or drastic shifts in international relations. Since the end of the war, the world has also increasingly globalized, which has also prompted the need for national memory and identity. Emily Rosenberg contends that with globalization, people seek structured identities that are in fact, anchored by historical memory, and that memory “provides structures for embraceable pasts” that support evolving identities.<sup>2</sup> Thus, memory forms within the framework of identity. Within the context of U.S.-Chinese relations, the memory of the Flying Tigers is a window into both the process of national identity creation at different moments in history, and the ebb and flow of international relations. The ways in which the Flying Tigers are portrayed domestically at different points in history correspond with the trends of U.S.-Chinese

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<sup>1</sup> Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 95.

<sup>2</sup> Emily S. Rosenberg, *A Date Which Will Live: Pearl Harbor in American History*, (Durham N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2005), 117.

relations. During the war, American popular media justified the alliance by portraying the Chinese as a stagnant civilization but worthy ally. In the Cold War period, the memory of the group diverged: the U.S. government reframed the Flying Tigers as a uniquely American operation decontextualized from the Chinese context that was linked with anticommunism; the Communist government neglected the alliance until the 1980s when Nationalist victories were co-opted into the official narrative of the war. When the government re-inserted the Flying Tigers into the national narrative of World War II history, they framed the operation as one of Chinese agency, as a way to promote a broad Chinese identity domestically and internationally, to assert China as an important Allied partner during World War II.

With U.S.-Chinese relations becoming increasingly important to both nations from the 2000s, different memory actors have depicted the alliance in a more equal light, as both governments come to terms with their evolving relationship yet again. The emergence of collaborative sites of memory such as *National Memories* and the Flying Tigers Heritage Park exemplify this slowly shifting narrative of the operation and the alliance as a more equal collaboration. Perhaps we can interpret these shifts as reflecting contemporary U.S.-Chinese relations that are currently undergoing significant changes. As China's president, Xi Jinping works toward large-scale economic and trade initiatives such as "One Belt One Road" and "Made in China 2025," that have very real geopolitical implications of restructuring Asia and the Pacific with China as its new center, Xi's goals of increasing China's strength and influence is very clear.

Looking to the future, as China continues to grow as a world power, and the U.S. grapples with shifting global dynamics, how will governments, militaries, and popular media reformulate the narrative of the Flying Tigers? Will we see a reversal of the AVG narratives in



which China will be upheld as a superior power? Will there be a moment in the future when the Flying Tigers cease to be an important symbol to both nations? In the immediate future at least, it seems as though the Flying Tigers remain significant. On March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2018, a member of the AVG Flying Tigers Facebook group shared a movie poster of a new Chinese movie entitled *The Bombing* on the group page. The movie, which will be released in May 2018, stars several famous Chinese actors, with a guest appearance by Bruce Willis and Mel Gibson as the artistic director. Although not explicitly focused on the Flying Tigers, the storyline of the movie includes American fighter pilots that go to China in 1943 to fight against the Japanese military. With the release of *The Bombing* and the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of landmark World War II events coming up in three years, the study of wartime memory continues to be pertinent in revealing how nations view themselves, their allies, and their enemies. While World War II and conflicts ever since the postwar era into the present, have shown us the evils that states and people are capable of, on the other hand, the story of the Flying Tigers also exemplifies the possibility of transnational collaboration and friendship between people, regardless of state relationships.

## Appendix I: Maps and Images

Figure 1: “Map of China,” Google Maps

<https://www.google.com/maps/search/map+of+kunming,+chengdu,+guilin/@31.404577,106.3943131,5.27z>. Accessed April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018.

Note: The red markers indicate the five locations I visited over Winter Term for primary source research. Below is a list of museums and archives that I visited in each location (from West to East).

**Kunming, Yunnan Province:** Kunming Flying Tigers Museum

**Anren, Sichuan Province:** Jianchuan Museum Cluster

**Guilin, Guangxi Province:** Flying Tigers Heritage Park (including Flying Tiger Memorial Museum Guilin)

**Kaohsiung City, Taiwan:** R.O.C. Air Force Museum

**Taipei, Taiwan:** Simin Peng Private Collection

I also visited the Yunnan Provincial Museum in Kunming and Academia Sinica (a research institute) in Taipei, but did not end up using materials gathered at these two sites in this thesis

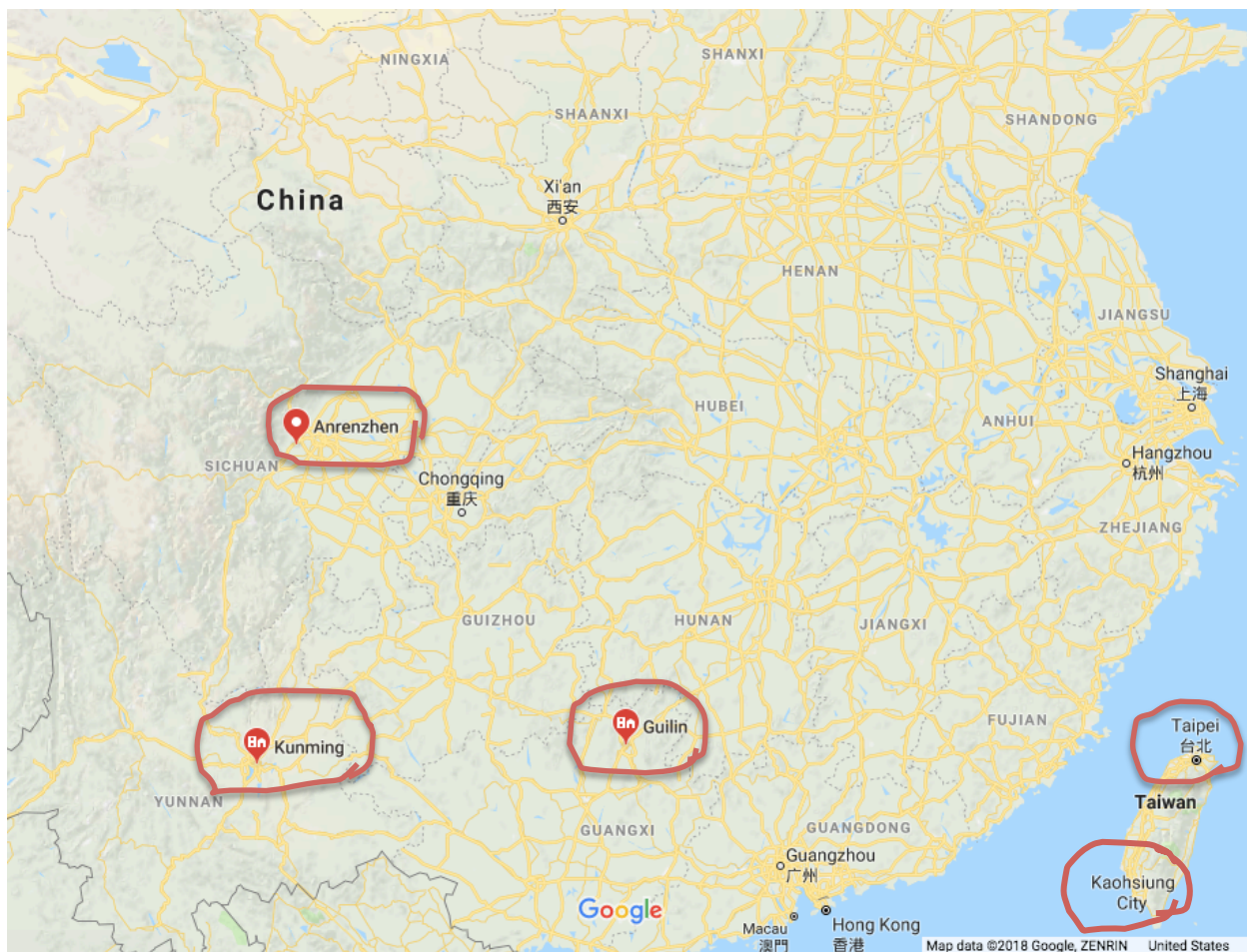


Figure 2: Basic Timeline of Second Sino-Japanese War (made by author)

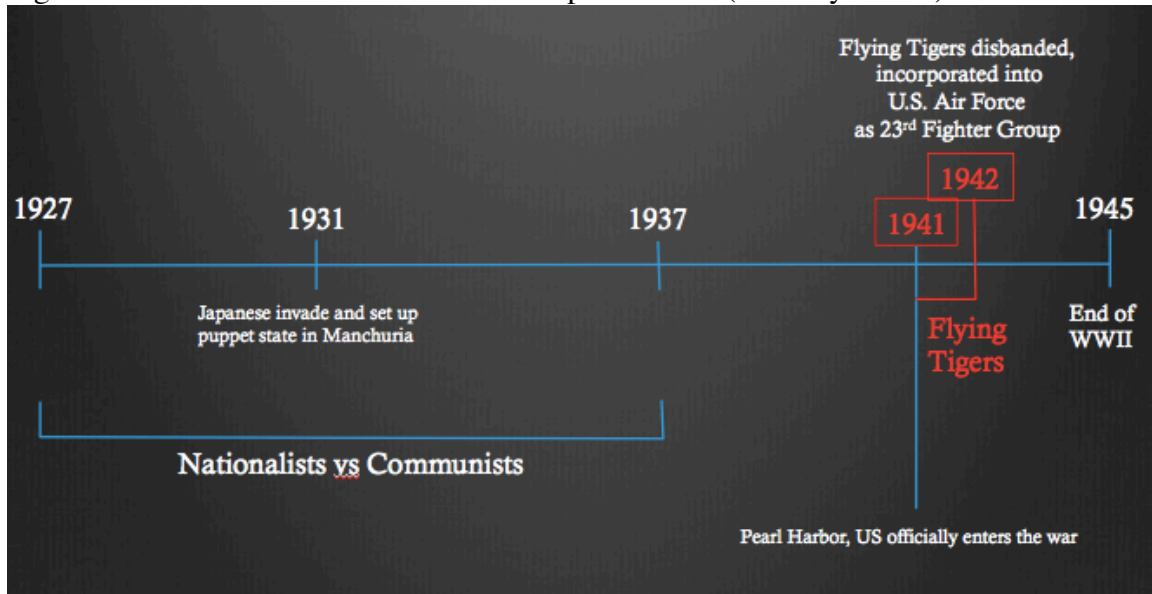


Figure 3: Post-World War II Timeline (made by author)

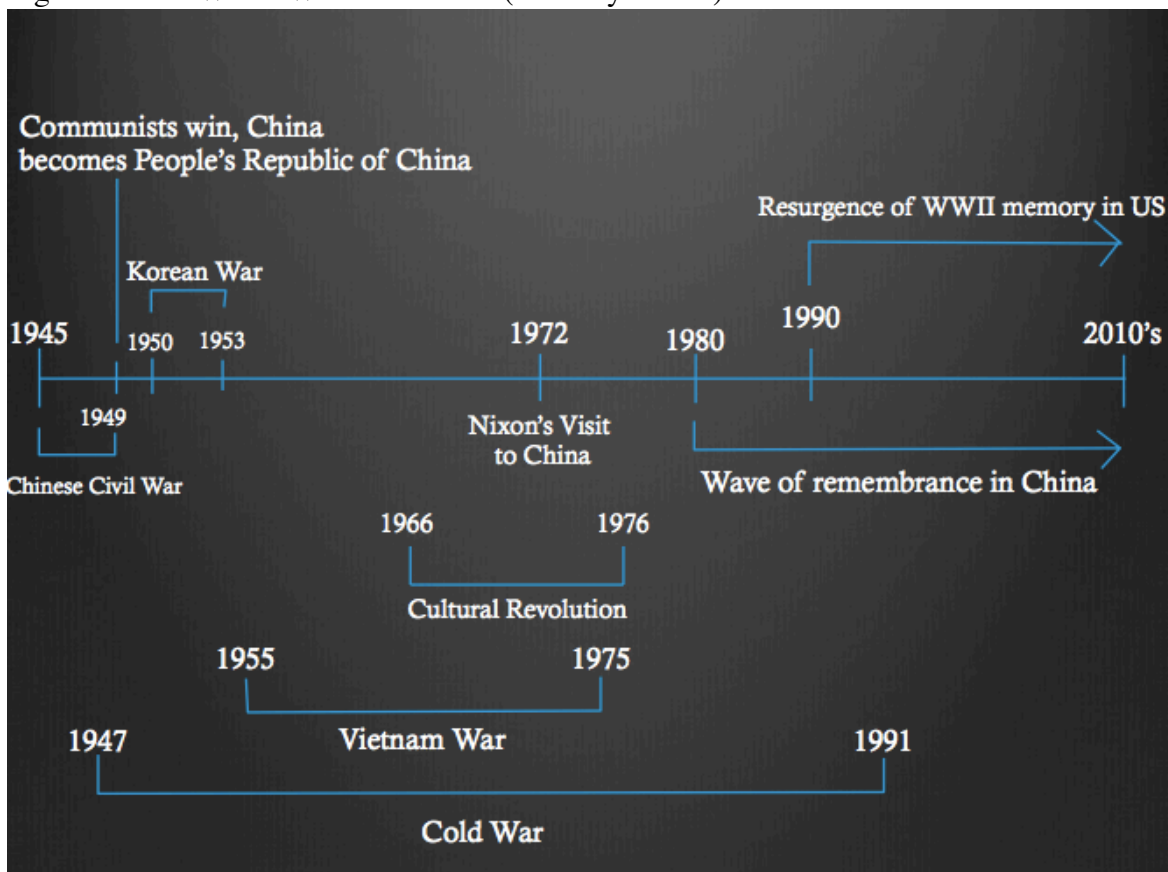


Figure 4: *Flying Tigers* Movie Poster. 1942. Print media online version. Available from <http://flickersintime.com/1942/flying-tigers-1942/>



Figure 5: Clare Boothe, "Life's Reports: The A.V.G. Ends Its Famous Career," *LIFE*, July 20, 1942, 5. Available from <https://books.google.com/books?id=6k0EAAAAMBAJ&q=flying+tigers#v=snippet&q=flying%20tigers&f=false>



Figure 6: Photo taken by author. "Blood Chit," produced by Chinese Nationalist Government, 1941. Archived in Simin Peng (彭思民) private collection. Visited December 25, 2017.



Figure 7: Photo taken by author. Panel depicting Chinese locals pulling stone rollers. Flying Tigers Memorial Museum Guilin in China (*Meiguo Feihudui Guilin Jinianguan*) <美国飞虎队桂林纪念馆> Guangxi, China. Permanent museum, 2015.



Figure 8: Photo taken by author. Monument of Chinese locals rescuing U.S. pilot, Flying Tiger Heritage Park (*Guilin Feihudui Yizhi Gongyuan*) 桂林飞虎队遗址公园 Guangxi, China. 2015.





Figure 9: Photo taken by author. “Sculptures of Flying Tigers in Guilin.” Flying Tigers Memorial Museum Guilin in China(*Meiguo Feihudui Guilin Jinianguan*) <美国飞虎队桂林纪念馆> Guangxi, China. Permanent museum, 2015.



Figure 10: *A Light of Friendship in Liberated Tengchong*, October 14, 1944, exhibited in *National Memories: US-China Collaboration During WWII*, Pacific Aviation Museum Pearl Harbor, Honolulu, Hawaii. Courtesy of staff at Pacific Aviation Museum, who shared 49 of the photos used in the exhibit and their original accompanying captions from the 1940s.



Figure 11: J.B. Hendricks, *1st Lt. Chester T. McGraw*, Seattle, Washington explaining football to a group of Chinese soldiers, October 15, 1944, exhibited in *National Memories: US-China Collaboration During WWII*, Pacific Aviation Museum Pearl Harbor, Honolulu, Hawaii.



Figure 12: *Untitled*, March 31, 1944, exhibited in *National Memories: US-China Collaboration During WWII*, Pacific Aviation Museum Pearl Harbor, Honolulu, Hawaii.



Figure 13: Photo taken by author. Panel depicting local appreciation for AVG. Flying Tigers Memorial Museum Guilin in China (*Meiguo Feihudui Guilin Jinianguan*) <美国飞虎队桂林纪念馆> Guangxi, China. Permanent museum, 2015.



Figure 14: Chennault's Tombstone in Arlington Cemetery (Front and Reverse)

Photo courtesy of Russell C. Jacobs, Front side of Claire Lee Chennault's Tombstone, taken at Arlington Cemetery on March 2006, reproduced on Arlington National Cemetery Website <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/clchenna.htm> Accessed April 2nd, 2018.



Reverse side of Chennault's Tombstone, taken at Arlington National Cemetery in June 2011, reproduced on <http://heroicrelics.org/arlington/soldiers/dsc78074.jpg.html> Accessed April 2nd, 2018.



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