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Cosmopolitanism Reinvented: Intercultural Encounters between Sino–African American Intellectuals in Early and Mid-20th Century China

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of global decolonization, nationalist movements, and civil upheavals in the early and mid-20th century, a renewed form of cosmopolitanism emerged through the intercultural encounters between African American and Chinese intellectuals. This cosmopolitan ideal was cultivated and embodied by these two historically, culturally, and geographically distinct communities and ultimately exerted lasting influences on a global scale. Despite initially perceiving China as a distant Other, African American authors such as Langston Hughes and W.E.B. Du Bois made their journeys to China in search of cultural inspiration for literary creations and social endeavors. While actively promoting the works of African American authors in China, the Chinese intellectual community in turn viewed the African American people as the Other Self and potential allies in international affairs. Mutual understanding and appreciation were pursued from both sides, leading to a co-reinvention of cosmopolitan ethos. By delving into the interconnected narratives, this article seeks to elucidate the nuanced dynamics and reciprocal influences that characterized the Sino–African American intellectual relationships in the context of international solidarity, decolonization, and the quest for social justice in the early and mid-20th century.

Keywords: Sino–African American intercultural encounters; cosmopolitanism; cultural community; 20th century China; African Americans in China

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1. Introduction

"Long Live the People's Republic of China. Long Live the Great Solidarity of the People of the World"—these are the slogans inscribed on the giant placards adorning the Gate Tower of Tiananmen Square, the national symbol of the New China's central power (Jia 2019, p. 146) and the world's largest open-air public space. Since 1950, these two placards have demonstrated China's unwavering commitment to the unity and well-being of the world's people. Remarkably, China's attention to "the people of the world" is nothing like the elite cosmopolitan ideal in classical Western philosophies that led to colonization and imperialism, but on the contrary, it is a unique kind of vigorous cosmopolitanism of all people, fighting against the Western power politics. When Chinese and African American intellectuals met on Chinese soil in the 20th century, the most unexpected yet creative collaboration took place—by celebrating their friendship and recognizing similar conditions between the two historically, culturally, and geographically distinct communities, this new kind of cosmopolitanism came into existence in their common endeavor.

The notion of "cosmopolitanism", as discussed here, is rooted in the specific cross-cultural interactions between African American and Chinese intellectuals in the historical context of the 20th century. It is also highly relevant to Kwame Anthony Appiah's theory of "rooted cosmopolitanism", which appeals to everyone's ethical responses. Cosmopolitanism is generally understood as "the philosophical idea that human beings have equal moral and political obligations to each other based solely on their humanity, without reference to state citizenship, national identity, religious affiliation, ethnicity, or place of birth"

(Cosmopolitanism 2019, p. 9). This broad concept can be emphasized in various ways on different occasions. Kwame Anthony Appiah, an American philosopher strongly influenced by W.E.B. Du Bois, explored the ethical implications of cosmopolitanism, arguing for mutual respect and understanding among all people in the world. In contrast to the previous Eurocentric and elitist cosmopolitanism, epitomized by Immanuel Kant's universal law and Western hegemony in global colonization, Appiah introduced a more inclusive, populist, and ethical approach to cosmopolitanism. To achieve this ideal, individuals should possess an awareness of both human diversity and the uniqueness of their own cultures, i.e., a "rooted cosmopolitanism" (Appiah 2007). During intercultural encounters in 20th-century China, both African American and Chinese intellectuals embodied the ethos and consciousness required for this kind of cosmopolitanism. It is essential to analyze these characteristics as reflected in their writings and actions in order to gain a deeper understanding of their intercultural encounters.

Sheng Anfeng points out the importance of studying the perspective of literary cosmopolitanism, stating that it "allows us to… lay the foundation for a deeper understanding of the necessity of cross-cultural communication in the era of globalization, and provides us with ideas and grounds for constructing a cultural community in the world" (Sheng 2023). The evolving concept of cosmopolitanism in early- and mid-20th-century China, particularly highlighted by the collaboration between Chinese and African American intellectual communities, marks the commencement of intercultural exchanges between two distinct cultures and demonstrates the cosmopolitan ethos of the time.

2. Intercultural Narratives and Encounters

The early attention of Chinese intellectuals to African Americans was no accident. It was in the turbulent years at the start of the 20th century that Lin Shu, a prolific Chinese translator of foreign literature, translated and published the first American novel in China—*Uncle Tom's Cabin*—in 1901. Lin did not translate the book's title according to its original meaning but changed it to "Tales of a Black Slave's Appeal to the Heaven" ("Heinu Yutian Lu") in Chinese. This title not only showed Lin's personal attitude and empathy towards African American slaves but also brought American racial problems to the attention of both Chinese elites and a Chinese mass audience. Lin's translation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel coincided with the signing of the unequal Treaty of the Boxer Protocol between the Qing government and the Eight-Nation Alliance, which perpetuated the plight of Chinese coolie laborers overseas. *Uncle Tom's Cabin, therefore,* provided Chinese readers not only with the knowledge of American slavery but also with the realization that Chinese indentured workers (especially the railway builders) were likely to be inhumanely treated in the U.S. Lin wrote a famous preface for his translation of this novel, urging attention to colored laborers in the U.S.:

> Recently, the mistreatment of the black slaves has been transferred to the yellow people. A serpent that cannot fully release its venom must gnaw on shrubs and plants to release the poison, [the consequences being detrimental]. Anyone who later touches these withered stalks will be harmed if not dead. Will we, the yellow people, die from touching these [poisonous] stalks? The nation [of the Qing Dynasty] hoards its land resources but not for development. The people cannot sustain themselves with their impoverished livelihoods, so they started to work and gain a living in the U.S., admiring the American way of life. Shrewd Americans [,however,] fear the drainage of their own wealth, maltreat the Chinese laborers so as to prevent their arrival. Consequently, Chinese sometimes suffer more than Black people do from these oppressions. (Lin 2017, Preface)[1]

According to Lin's statement, racism in the U.S. is not only poisonous but also contagious. Its targets had already spread from black people to Chinese laborers. Lin's primary concern was the conditions of Chinese people under the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882–1943), which legalized the mistreatment of Chinese laborers in the U.S. He urged all Chinese people at home and abroad to be aware of the dangers of racism, or slavery, in the case of

African Americans. He successfully persuaded his extensive readership to compare the position of the Chinese people in the world with that of the African Americans.

Lin's translation also popularized the literary image of Uncle Tom, a pitiful and docile black American slave, which greatly influenced generations of Chinese people's perceptions of African Americans. The character of Uncle Tom, introduced by Lin, might be the sole source of knowledge about African Americans for a Chinese, given the total absence of other materials about American slavery or Jim Crow in China at the time. Although Lin's primary aim was to reveal the evilness of America's institutionalized deprivation of both black and Chinese cheap labor, which led to "a mass awakening among the modern Chinese intellectuals" (Tao 1991), he also perpetuated the enduring stereotypical portrayals of black American slaves as Uncle Toms in the minds of Chinese readers. These images of African American slaves and laborers as the voiceless and oppressed, resigned to adversity, were juxtaposed with representations of American imperialists, colonizers, and wartime missionaries, forming a dialectical narrative that resonated with Chinese readers.

In contrast, African American authors' first encounters with China were more personal and have been less studied by historians and literary scholars. When the African American poet Langston Hughes set foot on Chinese soil via Japan in the summer of 1933, altering his itinerary from an extended stay in Russia, he was to witness realities in interwar Shanghai that bore no resemblance to the racialized stereotypes of Chinese people commonly propagated by the American media at a time when the Chinese Exclusion Act was in full effect. In his autobiographical travelogue *I Wonder as I Wander* (1956), Hughes vividly recounted his journey to Japan and China in the chapter titled "Color Around the Globe". The choice of this chapter's title reflects Hughes' contemplations on racial dynamics in the context of the color lines between the International Settlements and the Chinese districts in Shanghai and between the Japanese and their subjects in their Pan-Asiatic ambitions and military invasions. Hughes, having already achieved international acclaim as a poet across the Atlantic during the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s, was invited to several gatherings by some Chinese intellectuals. Hughes accepted a dinner invitation from Madame Song Ching-ling, wife of Sun Yat-sen, founder of the Republic of China and sister-in-law of Chiang Kai-Shek; he was feted at a luncheon hosted by a group of Chinese journalists and writers, where he met the Chinese translator of his novel *Not Without Laughter*; he even met Lu Xun (Ji 2021), arguably the most influential leading writer of modern Chinese literature, at a private gathering. The content of Hughes's meeting with Lu Xun has even aroused controversy and heated debate among some Chinese scholars (Zhang 2020), who have attempted to convey their own political opinions through such debates.

However, Hughes did not elaborate on his Chinese experiences in his works of nonfiction. It was his later poems, such as "Roar, China!" (1937), "Song of the Refugee Road" (1940), "Little Song" (1948), "Consider Me" (1951–1952), "In Explanation of Our Times" (1955), "China" (1963), and "Birmingham Sunday" (1963), that "underpin Hughes's sustained belief in the inevitability of China as a major player in the worldwide call for proletarian revolution" (Lai-Henderson 2020). There is a plethora of studies discussing Hughes's inclinations towards the ideals of the American Communists and Communist International, seeking to build a connection among the "oppressed people of the world" through literary practices—scholars such as Luo Lianggong, William Maxwell, James Smethurst, Alan Wald, and Mary Helen Washington have written extensively on the themes of African American literary modernism, black communism, and proletarian literature. As Luo argues, "Hughes's poetic practice uses the imagined 'Chinese' metonym to globalize his own particular experience as an African American within the United States context and to link it to the then-contemporary experience of a Chinese revolutionary reality" (Luo 2012). Indeed, Hughes's experience as an African American was not only "globalized" but also opened up to a broader cosmopolitan ideal through these Chinese images or themes at a time when "an internationalism on the part of African American writers… was unprecedented in its scope" (Smethurst 1946, p. 8). His concern went beyond the geographical concept of the "globe", but always related to the people of the world. Therefore, both as

an outsider to Chinese culture and language and a poet with cosmopolitan ideals, Hughes transformed China from a distant Other into a cultural inspiration for the world with his literary creations. These poems on Chinese themes not only allowed Hughes to articulate his literary cosmopolitan ideals through the voice of a world-traveling African American speaker but also opened up possibilities for potential solidarity between Chinese and African American intellectuals.

When it comes to the mid-20th century, at the dawn of the New China (the People's Republic of China, established in 1949), communist cosmopolitan ideals became predominant in the intercultural interactions between Chinese and African American intellectuals. At the national level, prominent African American figures such as W.E.B. and Shirley Graham Du Bois, Viki Garvin, Robert and Mabel Williams, and Huey Newton were officially invited to China by the Chinese government. The Communist International, or the Third International, exerted great influence on Chinese foreign policy. With the support of his second wife Shirley Graham, Du Bois started to expand his dictum about the importance of the color line in the 20th century to Asian countries and made two trips to the People's Republic of China in 1959 and briefly in 1962, after his previous visit in 1936. Like Langston Hughes, the Du Boises were on a world tour when they arrived in China, but this was at a more critical time when Sino–American relations were rapidly deteriorating because of McCarthyism and the Korean War (1950–1953). The Du Boises risked imprisonment for "trading with the enemy" (Du Bois 2007) while traveling to China via Russia with passports "not valid for travel to… those portions of China, Korea and Viet-Nam under Communist control" (Du Bois, 91, Lauds China 1959). Despite the political pressure from the U.S. government and the ransacking of his home during his absence, Du Bois still felt that "as the Chinese government had already invited him in 1956 to come to celebrate the 250th birthday of Benjamin Franklin, the trip was an overdue pleasure" (Gao 2013). The couple were warmly welcomed by China's leading intellectuals and politicians, represented by Guo Moruo, head of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and Madame Song Ching-ling, widow of Sun Yat-sen. As part of Chairman Mao Zedong's strategy of fostering alliances with emerging African nations, the Du Boises' visits received positive and extensive coverage in *People's Daily* (*Renmin Ribao*), the flagship newspaper and authoritative medium of the Chinese Communist government, highlighting their international significance in building friendship in Pan-African and Pan-Asian countries. Following the Du Boises, other eminent African American scholars and revolutionary activists paid their visits to China before 1972 when Sino–U.S. diplomatic relations started to normalize. In particular, Gao Yunxiang acknowledged the importance of Shirley Graham Du Bois in interpreting her husband's vision of China, her devotion to the cause of women in China, and her contribution to "the new understanding of the ties between Red China and Black America" during the Cultural Revolution years (Gao 2013). As many scholars, represented by Robin D.G. Kelley, Bill V. Mullen, and Gerald Horne, have elaborated on the influences of Du Bois's China trip on his own philosophy of uniting the people of color and on later radical black movements, it should be noted that the Chinese also gained much by celebrating the couple as ambassadors of the cosmopolitan ideal of Sino–African people's solidarity. By translating, reporting, and disseminating their writings and speeches, the Chinese started to portray the African American people as Another Self and potential allies in their pursuit of validating the authority of the Chinese communist government and amplifying China's voices in international affairs.

Notably, intercultural imaginations played a pivotal role in the reinvention of cosmopolitan ideals expressed in both Langston Hughes's writing and the Chinese coverage of the Du Boises' official visits. Both Chinese and African American images went beyond mere factual accounts of reality. Rather, they are carefully crafted artistic creations derived from keen observation, imagination, and the association of these historically and culturally different people. It was on the basis of these imaginations that Langston Hughes and the Du Boises set sail for China and that Chinese intellectuals commenced introducing their

works to the Chinese readership, making intercultural communication, translation, cooperation, and mutual appreciation a reality.

3. Chinese People as a Distant Other and a Cultural Inspiration

Entrenched stereotypes of the Other were both the reason for and the way in which Langston Hughes began his journey to China in 1933. Disappointed and irritated by the Russian movie director who was making a movie about African Americans with a total disregard for American racial realities, Hughes cut short his stay in Moscow and set Shanghai as his next stop before returning to the U.S. People's ignorance of black people as the Other took various forms in Hughes's travels, the foremost being the matter of color lines—it was blatant anti-black racism in the Jim Crow American South and Latin America; it was undue pity and ignorance of black history in Russia; and it was xenophobic and unjust suspicion in Japan. Being constantly subjected to stereotypes, Hughes shared this feeling with the Chinese people who also fell victim to white colonial racism and discrimination. Boldly ignoring the "warnings by Occidentals not to go outside the International Settlement alone", Hughes ventured into the Chinese districts only to find "the Chinese in Shanghai a very jolly people, much like colored folks at home" (Hughes 1964, p. 250). By coming to know the Chinese city and people personally, Hughes felt the connection between the two groups of colored people and sensed a mixed feeling of belonging, empathy, and inspiration from his Chinese experiences. The Chinese people, though as a distant Other in Hughes's eyes, were given a voice in his writing and became a source of cultural inspiration for his large literary audience.

At the beginning of his Chinese experience, Hughes immediately gained a new understanding of people of color (both black and Chinese) in China, which drew him closer to the distant Other, the Chinese people. Hughes's very first encounter with a person in Shanghai, recorded in *I Wonder as I Wander*, was a scene of great symbolic significance. Hughes was new to the city and started his tour all alone:

> I didn't know a soul in the city. But hardly had I climbed into a rickshaw than I saw riding in another along the Bund a Negro who looked exactly like a Harlemite. I stood up in my rickshaw and yelled, "Hey, man!"
>
> He stood up in his rickshaw and yelled, "What ya sayin'?" We passed each other in the crowded street, and I never saw him again. (Hughes 1964, p. 245)

It was the very act of joining the Chinese way of life, sitting in a rickshaw, that initiated Hughes' sense of familiarity and attempts to learn more. He had experienced a cognitive shift in this brief encounter, from "didn't know" to "know" to "want to know more" in the actions of seeing and wanting to talk to a person of his own race. The meeting with a Harlemite was an accidental occurrence but writing it as the first scene with a man in China is undoubtedly a complex design. Both this black man and the Chinese background carry profound symbolism, suggesting the potential for harmonious coexistence, mutual understanding, and support between these two different racial groups who can draw much inspiration from each other. Furthermore, the incommunicability between these two black persons makes the symbolism even more intricate. The stranger did not catch up with Hughes's greeting, even though they spoke the same language and probably had similar Harlem experiences. The prospect of knowing a black person soon disappeared into the crowded Chinese streets, where the black stranger became one of the Chinese strangers with whom Hughes could not engage in small talk. Therefore, for Hughes, the black stranger's identity shifted from "black" to "Chinse", and vice versa, the Chinese were no longer beyond communication or comprehension. This was Hughes's first impression of the colored people in Shanghai—they were just humans, regardless of their race.

By observing Chinese people and immersing himself in their way of life, Hughes was able to personally examine the racial stereotypes and develop a fresh understanding and empathy for people of color worldwide. Hughes's perception of Shanghai was a blend of his pre-existing knowledge and his personal experiences. He was told various shocking

tales related to China, especially about food, which fit into the racist food stereotypes in the U.S. not only of the Chinese but also of African Americans as a "low-down and dirty shame" (Williams-Forson 2022, p. 47). "Careless eating could be very dangerous, foreigners said… It was down this death-polluted river [the Yangtze River] that junks brought the red-hearted watermelons to Shanghai." (Hughes 1964, p. 245) However, Hughes did not find the saying convincing and attempted to rebuke the rumors through his actual practice of continuing to eat watermelons during his entire stay in Shanghai. Watermelons are the first food Hughes mentioned on his trip to Shanghai. Whether consciously or unconsciously aware of the anti-black connotations (Black 2024), Hughes attached his resilient and rebellious attitude towards racial stereotypes to his act of eating watermelons. Thus, this simple act of eating watermelons in China aligned black people with Chinese people, both of whom suffered from the color lines allocated by white Orientalists. It was in this engagement with Chinese life that Hughes found ways to express his ethical resistance both for the Chinese people and for African Americans who shared a similar fate in the face of racial issues.

A sense of justice and indignation at injustice thus emerged from Hughes's close interactions and shared emotions with this distant Other of the Chinese people. As the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas explained the ethics of relations with the Other—each "I" is totally and irreducibly responsible for the Other whom they encounter face-to-face (Levinas 1969, p. 194). In Hughes's face-to-face encounter with the Chinese people and life, there is a sense of responsibility to let the voice of the Chinese people be heard and to let the world know about the realities in China. Hughes went beyond the typical stereotypes and tried to delve into the colonial reasons for the chaos in "incredible Shanghai", where corruption and violence were part of the daily function for a reason—child labor, professional beggars, prostitution, kidnapping, and the white foreigners' open "color line against the Chinese in China itself" (Hughes 1964, p. 240).

> While the raw materials of the narcotics trade flowed over the Bund to the Western world, child slaves were sold to factories, and students imprisoned for harboring "dangerous thoughts" against Chiang Kai-Shek; on Nanking Road and the other brilliantly lighted streets, at evening, in the cafés and gambling houses mah-jongg chips rattled like locust pods in a high wind… "It won't be long until the Japs take over". (Hughes 1964, pp. 249–50)

Hughes pointed out that a serious reason for the chaos in Shanghai was the inhuman intention of the colonists and the irresponsible Chinese authorities of the time. The local people, victims of colonialism and the corrupt rule, gained more recognition and identification for Hughes than the Americans in Shanghai. "I was more afraid of going into the world-famous Cathy Hotel than I was of going into any public place in the Chinese quarters… But beyond the gates of the International Settlement, color was no barrier. I could go anywhere" (Hughes 1964, pp. 250–51). Thus, speaking for the voiceless Chinese people became one of Hughes's literary ambitions, although the image of Chinese people in his writing remained that of a distant Other.

Aside from his travel journals, Hughes's fame as a poet was built on a series of poems that projected his concern and responsibility for the Chinese people. Hughes's most studied poem about China, "Roar, China!" (1937), was published shortly after his trip to Shanghai when the Japanese invasion of China was escalating. Luo Lianggong pointed out that there was a "Chinese turn" in Hughes's poetry in the 1930s, which departed from his moralist and humanist modes in the 1920s and "recast them by the light of a newly viable and more radical alternative" (Luo 2012, p. 112). By characterizing China as a captivating place that would lead international revolutions against Western imperialism, and the Chinese people as a distant but latently powerful Other, Hughes's poems served to demonstrate the transformations in his perception and anticipation of the world—the imperialist oppression of people around the world, both of Chinese and African Americans, was to be defeated and eliminated. In the closing lines of "Roar, China!", the call to the

oppressed people is extended from the particular Chinese situation to the common oppressions around the world:

> Laugh—and roar, China! Time to spit fire!
> Open your mouth, old dragon of the East.
> …
> Break the chains of the East,
> Little coolie boy!
> Break the chains of the East,
> Red generals!
> Break the chains of the East,
> Child slaves in the factories!
> Smash the iron gates of the Concessions!
> Smash the pious doors of the missionary houses!
> Smash the revolving doors of the Jim Crow Y.M.C.A.'s.
> Crush the enemies of land and bread and freedom!
> Stand up and roar, China!
> You know what you want!
> The only way to get it is
> To take it!
> Roar, China! (Hughes 1994, pp. 198–200)

The entire poem is written in affirmative imperative sentences, demonstrating the speaker's strong commitment and the urgency of the oppressed people to rise up against their oppressors. In the repetition and sequence of the powerful actions "break", "smash", "crush", "stand up", and "roar", the dynamics of a revolution are exposed and portrayed as a great cause, appealing not only to the Chinese people but also to all oppressed people who share a similar fate. In the speaker's passionate denunciation of imperialist crimes against the poor and colored people, he gave a voice to all the victims and made for them a strong unity with revolutionary potentialities. In this way, the images of China and the Chinese people no longer remain static as a distant Other or as a single national image but are transformed in the culture of the world revolution into a decisive point of unity and a group of highly committed fighters for the great cause of all mankind.

As Lai-Henderson remarks, Hughes's "sojourn pushes beyond the limits of black internationalism as he responds to American and European global hegemony by using China as an experimental ground" (Lai-Henderson 2020). Hughes was one of the first African American writers who personally visited China and brought back to African American intellectual circles his first-hand observations and artistic creations on Chinese themes. His experiments were undoubtedly successful—not only in transforming China from a static distant Other into a dynamic revolutionary warrior but also in envisioning the possible alliances between African Americans and Chinese people on both sides of the Pacific. Lanston Hughes's experiences and writings paved the way for the development of African American and Chinese relations and placed China in the cosmopolitan schemes of other African American scholars such as W.E.B. and Shirley Graham Du Bois, Viki Garvin, Robert and Mabel Williams, Elaine Brown, and Huey P. Newton, all of whom visited the New China after 1949.

4. African Americans as the Other Self and Potential Allies

The founding of the People's Republic of China was announced by then Chairman Mao Zedong on 1 October 1949, marking the victory of the Chinese Communist Party over the Nationalist Party in the Civil War and the start of a new era of China's economic growth, political reform, and foreign friendships. Relations between African Americans and Chinese people were drawn closer at this time as their friendship was promoted by the new Chinese government. Their mutual needs laid the foundation for their intercultural encounters as well as political alliances—the new Chinese government was seeking leader-

ship on ethnic issues within the country and international recognition, while African Americans were trying to fight against McCarthyism and for civil rights by gaining sympathy and support from Afro–Asian countries worldwide. Under such circumstances, seeking friendship with African American leaders became part of China's foreign diplomacy—by identifying African American people as a good friend or the Other Self, the Chinese government was able to gain allies in the struggle against colonialism and imperialism.

W.E.B. Du Bois, already internationally renowned as a Pan-Africanist civil rights activist since the beginning of the mid-20th century, was the first African American intellectual to be officially invited to China by the Chinese government. In the late 1950s, "Chairman Mao Zedong wished to cultivate alliances with emerging African nations and regarded Du Bois, with his immense reputation, as key to the effort" (Gao 2013). The Chinese government saw in its friendship with African Americans the possibility of uniting all black and Chinese people across the world. Although African Americans did not have their own nation-state or hold a decisive role in international affairs, the Chinese government saw it fit to reach out to African American internationalists, represented by the Du Boises, to seek their support for the Chinese communist cause and alliances with African countries.

In fact, long before the official invitations from the government of the People's Republic of China in the late 1950s, Du Bois had traveled to Shanghai, China, in 1936 with an optimistic attitude towards the Japanese Pan-Asianist ideals, which led to a series of brutal colonial aggressions in Asia. It was three years after Lanston Hughes's personal travel to China when the nation was under the rule of the pro-American Nationalist Party and threatened by the outbreak of the impending Second Sino–Japanese War (1937–1945). Bringing theory into practice, Du Bois set out shortly after the publication of *Black Reconstruction in America* to visit four countries, Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, China, and Japan, "each attempting what Du Bois regarded as an 'experiment of Marxism' toward resolution" (Mullen 2015, pp. 127–28). Unlike Langston Hughes, who was intensely disgusted by the Japanese invasion of other Asian countries, Du Bois showed his favor for Japan's Asiatic schemes throughout the 1930s, writing and lecturing on them as "Japan's example of colored self-determination and self-sustaining competition in the capitalist global order" (Lewis 2000, p. 391), in a sense justifying its colonial aggression in Asia. Du Bois was not the only African American who held such beliefs. There was a certain "colored pride" spreading among a number of African American intellectuals when Japan, a non-European country, lorded over the colonial imperialist British, French, and Americans in Shanghai (Lewis 2000, p. 300). Du Bois, along with other African American intellectuals, saw an aggressive cosmopolitan vision in Japan's ambitions and, deliberately ignoring its Fascist potential, misused it as a possible weapon that could break the color line or the imperialist world order established by the white Western powers.

It was not until Japan's defeat in 1945 that Du Bois gradually changed his views on Asian issues, which immediately appealed to the Chinese communists' attention. In his 1945 book *Color and Democracy*, Du Bois blamed Japan's adoption of Western imperialism for its downfall and abuse of China, and started to assert optimistically that "China is being built up today [in the post WWII years] as one of the world's greatest nations, destined to sit with Great Britain, Russia, the United States, and France and co-ruler of the world" (Du Bois 1945, p. 59). By the late 1940s, Du Bois was openly supportive of the USSR and, consequently, approved its alliance with the Chinese Communist government after 1949. Du Bois's Marxist ideas were in accordance with the Chinese Communist government on many issues, such as anti-colonialism, the unification of the oppressed people of the world, and the alliance of colored people worldwide. When Du Bois made his famous analysis that "the colonies are the slums of the world", he specifically mentioned the victimized "Negro slavery and Chinese coolies" and attacked the white man's "logic of the modern colonial system: Colonies are filled with peoples who never were abreast with civilization and never can be" (Du Bois 1945, pp. 17–18). The rise of the New China was undoubtedly a living and successful example of the demolition of this Western colo-

nial logic. As Bill Mullen stated, Mao Zedong's mass or peasant-based theory of revolution "displaced the [White] industrial proletariat at the center of Marxist revolution", (Mullen 2004, pp. 27–28) providing a model for African socialism as well as African American communist endeavors.

In as early as February 1949, several months prior to the official announcement of the establishment of the New China, the Chinese Communist Party started to introduce Du Bois to the Chinese people in a positive light. *People's Daily*, the official newspaper of the Chinese Communist government, which was still based in Yan'an before moving to Beijing, portrayed him as an able African American leader and valiant civil rights campaigner in a report on an abolitionist conference in the United States. In particular, the report quoted Du Bois's criticism of the American government for failing to deliver on its promises of development and bringing war to its people. Du Bois called upon black Americans—"Black people must be united from within, and join the side of democracy in the worldwide struggles between reactionary and democratic camps" (Black and White Representatives from Twenty-Eight States in the United States Gathered, Demanding End of Racial Discrimination 1949). The Chinese media did not select this quotation at random but with the intention to propose a possible path of development for the New China that reflected Du Bois's proposals for internal unity and democracy among the colored people. By taking a stance supporting Du Bois on international racial issues, the Chinese government made its attempt to align itself with black people worldwide and treat them as allies.

When W.E.B. Du Bois was invited to China with his wife Shirley Graham in 1959, his pivotal role in liberating the deprived people and bringing peace to the post-WWII world garnered extensive and lasting coverage and praise in *People's Daily*. The 10th anniversary of his presence as an American representative at the International Congress for Peace in Paris in 1949 was highly celebrated (Du Bois, the Famous American Black Scholar and a Member of the World Peace Council, and His Wife Arrive in Beijing 1959); his speech on African, Chinese, and Russian communist alliances at Peking University was translated and published in full (Du Bois Issues a Call to the African People: Africa, Stand Up! Face the Rising Sun! The Black Continent Could Gain the Most Friendship and Sympathy from China 1959); his birthday was celebrated with Chinese officials as well as all Chinese citizens (Yu 1959). Du Bois, in the consecutive coverage in *People's Daily*, became a fighter for all African and Chinese causes and a spokesman for the Chinese government's diplomatic plans, whether criticizing American imperialism, calling for the international communist solidarity of the African and Asian proletariat, or supporting and admiring Chinese policies and development. "While this (the condensed news coverage by the Chinese Communist government) may be regarded as standard communist rhetoric, it opened the possibility that the Chinese and Du Bois might learn from each other" (Gao 2013, pp. 59–85). Du Bois's visits to China brought immense mutual benefits—with the help of Du Bois's international influence, China was given a stronger and more authoritative voice in leading the new country as well as in promoting the consolidation of African and Asian countries worldwide; with China providing the milieu and themes, Du Bois could better develop his own Pan-African cause for the liberation of the colored people of the world.

Shirley Graham Du Bois also enjoyed an unblemished reputation in China for her steadfast communist beliefs and supportive attitude towards the Chinese communist government. Shirley Graham, being a communist long before her marriage to Du Bois, exerted much influence on Du Bois' career in his later years. Graham is credited with broadening Du Bois's cooperation with people of other races, bringing him closer to the Party, and "no doubt facilitated his membership" (Horne 2000, p. 164) in 1961. She was recognized by the Chinese government as a member of the World Peace Council, a cultural ambassador of American–Soviet friendship, a fighter for Chinese women's causes, and "an admirer of Chairman Mao, a lover of the New China who empathized with and supported China's socialist revolution and socialist construction, and is a true friend of the Chinese people" (Memorial Service for Mrs. Du Bois was Held in Beijing: Premier Hua Guofeng Sent Wreaths; Chen Yonggui, Guo Moruo, Deng Yingchao, and others Sent Wreaths; Chen

Yonggui, Deng Yingchao, and Others Attended the Memorial service 1977). She was constantly hailed for one of her heroic deeds—together with Paul Robeson's wife, she tore down and tossed away the Nationalist flag of Taiwan at the Conference on African Unity in Ghana, showing her anger at the U.S.'s "Two Chinas" policy and asserting to the world the just fact that "there is only one China" (Yu 1959). She wrote a biography of Paul Robeson, the renowned African American musician, actor, and activist who popularized China's international prestige with his song "Chee Lai" (or "Arise", later adopted as the national anthem of the People's Republic of China) in the 1940s. This biography was translated into Chinese as early as 1950 and "created an association in Chinese minds between Graham and the revered Robeson" (Graham 1950). Both she and Du Bois renounced their American citizenship and became citizens of Ghana. After Du Bois' death in Accra, Ghana, in 1963, Shirley Graham continued to promote the cause of anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism, traveling extensively in Africa, Europe, Asia, and occasionally the U.S. She dedicated her last few years to the cause of Chinese women during the Cultural Revolution and passed away in Beijing in 1977, receiving a state funeral.

The Du Boises's legacy inspired a closer and more collaborative relationship between the Chinese government and African American intellectuals in the 1960s. After Du Bois' death in 1963, Robert F. Williams entered the Chinese government's sights, when the Chinese Communist government was in dire need of another internationally recognized black intellectual to assume Du Bois' role (Yu 2014, pp. 144–68) as a spokesman for Chinese revolutionary ideals on the global stage. Robert F. Williams was a former NAACP[2] leader and advocate of African American people's armed self-defense movement against the violence of the Ku Klux Klan in the late 1950s and early 1960s. His book *Negro with Guns* (1962) greatly inspired the leaders of the Black Panther Party and was promptly translated and published in Chinese in 1963 (Williams 1963). By then, Williams was in exile in Cuba, having been falsely accused of kidnapping his political opponents. After appealing to many world leaders about the Birmingham Church Bombing[3], only Mao Zedong responded by offering him asylum in China. Upon his arrival in China in 1965, he worked at Mao's side and continued to advocate armed resistance against oppressors.

On 8 August 1963, in response to Williams' call, Mao Zedong issued the "Statement Supporting the Afro-Americans in their Just Struggle against Racial Discrimination by U.S. Imperialism" ("Huyu Shijie Renmin Lianheqilai Fandui Meiguo Diguozhuyi de Zhongzuqishi de Douzheng de Shengming"). In this statement, Mao provided a comprehensive overview of the heroic uprisings of African Americans against the oppressive Jim Crow system in the U.S., highlighting their resistance as an integral part of the global class struggle that deserved support from all just nations around the world. At the end of the Statement, Mao again emphasized the importance of the African American civil uprising, aligning it as part of the global class struggle of all oppressed people who constitute the majority of the world's population:

> I call on the workers, peasants, revolutionary intellectuals, enlightened elements of the bourgeoisie and other enlightened persons of all colors in the world, whether white, black, yellow or brown, to unite to oppose the racial discrimination practiced by U.S. imperialism and support the American Negroes in their struggle against racial discrimination… At present, it is the handful of imperialists headed by the United Slates, and their supporters, the reactionaries in different countries, who are oppressing, committing aggression against and menacing the overwhelming majority of the nations and peoples of the world. We are in the majority and they are in the minority. At most, they make up less than 10 per cent of the 3000 million population of the world. I am firmly convinced that, with the support of more than 90 per cent of the people of the world, the American Negroes will be victorious in their just struggle. The evil system of colonialism and imperialism arose and throve with the enslavement of Negroes and the trade in Negroes, and it will surely come to its end with the complete emancipation of the black people. ("Statement Supporting the Afro-Americans in their Just Struggle

against Racial Discrimination by U.S. Imperialism (Mao Zedong, 8 August 1963)" Mao 1963)

By recognizing African American civil disobedience as part of the global responsibility for 90% of humanity, and by identifying African Americans and Chinese people as belonging to the same category of oppressed people who must fight and succeed, Mao also naturalized the justice and necessity of the Chinese revolution. It is this cosmopolitan blueprint that fastened China's relations with the world and rationalized class struggles taking place both inside and outside China.

During his time in China (1965–1969), Robert F. Williams crossed paths with other African American exiles including Vicki Garvin, a political activist, Pan-Africanist, and self-described working-class internationalist who arrived in China in 1964 and then spent the following five years teaching English in Shanghai and establishing the Shanghai Foreign Language Institute's first course on African American history (McDuffie and Woodard 2013, pp. 507–38). It was also Vicki Garvin who introduced Malcolm X, an African American minister, civil rights leader, and black nationalist who advocated self-defense and inspired the Black Power movement, to the Chinese ambassador to Ghana, Huang Hua, and helped direct Malcolm X's interest in Chinese revolutions[4]. Thanks to these African American activists, Chinese revolutions become a frequent topic of international conversation, helping China gain moral support from overseas. While China was enjoying popularity and recognition on a global scale, China shifted its development in another direction.

In 1971, Black Panther Party leaders Huey Newton and Elaine Brown, who had been instrumental in circulating Mao's *Red Book* among American readers, were invited to China as a delegation. By this time, however, the Chinese government had become increasingly antagonistic to the Soviet Union and began to foster better relations with the U.S. government. At a banquet on 5 October 1971, Premier Zhou Enlai encouraged Newton and other Black Panther Party members to drop their revolutionary rhetoric and promote cordial relations between the U.S. and China (Bloom and Martin 2013, pp. 1–2). Zhou's meeting with Newton ultimately became part of China's efforts to normalize diplomatic relations with the United States, which eventually came to fruition with Nixon's visit to Beijing in 1972. As Sino–American diplomatic relations tightened in the post-1972 years, the Chinese government began to soften its stance towards African American civil rights leaders and other black internationalists, but their close comradeships and unwavering support during the revolutionary years were never to be forgotten.

5. Conclusions: Cosmopolitanism Reinvented

Cosmopolitanism, reflected in the intercultural encounters between African American and Chinese intellectuals, was a fluid concept in 20th-century China. Lin Shu's translation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the late Qing Dynasty first circulated among Chinese readers the idea that African Americans and Chinese overseas laborers were in the same situation; Langston Hughes, the first established African American poet to travel to the Republic of China and write about his personal experiences in China, gave a voice to the ordinary Chinese people and spoke for them on an international stage; the Du Boises, who were designated by the government of the People's Republic of China as cultural ambassadors, provided much support for China's vital position in the global struggle against imperialism and colonialism. Both Chinese and African Americans have experienced great changes in their own histories while gradually deepening their mutual understanding and developing their opinions. As a result, their awareness of each other and their concern for the people of the world are subject to change or are constantly being reinvented with the passage of time.

At the heart of this self-reinventing cosmopolitanism is an unchanging passion for engagement in international affairs. It is the unceasing longing to know, to learn, to participate, and to share responsibility for the world that makes possible the intercultural encounters between the historically, culturally, and geographically distinct Chinese and African American people. The connotation of "People of the World" in the slogan on

Tiananmen Square can change in different historical periods and is always open to new interpretations as new situations arise. However, the slogan itself, like humankind's belief in cosmopolitanism, has never changed from 1950 to the present and will not change easily in the future.

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Notes

1 Original text in traditional Chinese: "邇又寢遷共處黑奴者，以處黃人矣。夫蝮之不竟伸其毒，必別齧草木舒憤。後人來觸死莖，亦靡不死。吾黃人殆觸其死莖乎？國蓄地產而不發，民生貧薄不可自聊，始以工食於美洲，歲致羨其家。彼中精計學者患洩其銀幣，乃酷待華工，以絕其來。因之黃人受虐，或加甚於黑人." The English version was translated by the author of this article.

2 The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), founded in New York in 1909 by an inter-racial group consisting of W.E.B. Du Bois and others, is an inter-racial American organization created to work for the abolition of racial segregation and discrimination in various aspects of life; to oppose racism; and to secure the constitutional rights of African Americans.

3 The Birmingham church bombing, on 15 September 1963 in Alabama, was a premeditated act of racial vengeance against black civil rights leaders. Four young girls were killed, and many others were injured. Outrage over the incident and the violent clashes between protesters and police that followed helped draw national attention to the hard-fought, often dangerous struggle for civil rights for African Americans.

4 Malcolm X's 1964 speech at Cory Methodist Church in Cleveland, Ohio, is famous for its juxtaposition of the "ballot or the bullet", in which he called for "expand[ing] the civil-rights struggle to the level of human rights" and taking it to China, where 800 million Chinese citizens were "sitting there waiting to throw their weight on our side". Full speech transcript retrieved 16 May 2024 at http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/speeches/malcolm_x_ballot.html (accessed on 6 August 2024).

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