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New Book Details American Missteps in War on Chinese Communism

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – A new book by Illinois Wesleyan University Associate Professor of History Thomas D. Lutze explores how American anti-Communism in China after World War II helped tip the middle classes to the side of the Communists, unintentionally aiding their victory.

In Lutze's book, *China's Inevitable Revolution: Rethinking America's Loss to the Communists*, published by Palgrave-Macmillan, he argues that American support for Nationalist Party leader Chiang Kai-shek convinced the democratically-minded Chinese middle classes to align with the Communists in the late 1940s.

"Americans were taught during the Cold War that anti-Communism and pro-democracy were flip-sides of the same coin. The great irony is that in China the American effort to contain Communism actually constrained democracy," maintained Lutze, who said the middle class saw Chiang Kai-shek as a dictator. The United States policy was to support Chiang as an anti-Communist and a friend of American interests in China; at the same time, Washington hoped to win over the liberals to bring about reform of Chiang's one-party rule. But the two policies were contradictory. "True democrats in China abandoned the American side and threw their support to the Communists."

The book is part of Lutze's ongoing study of the middle class and the Chinese Communist Revolution that dates back to his graduate work at the University of Wisconsin, where he earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in 1973 and 1989. He spent time studying East Asian history and the history of U.S. foreign relations at Cornell University and at Peking University before earning his doctorate in modern Chinese history at the University of Wisconsin in 1996. His ties with Peking University (PKU) aided him in writing the book. "Thanks to colleagues at PKU, I had access to photos, archives, and interviews with middle-class liberals and leaders of China's democratic parties who were active during the Revolution," said Lutze.

According to Lutze, scholars have generally ignored the middle class when examining the history of the Chinese Communist Revolution. "The middle class democrats have been

dismissed in retrospect,” said Lutze, “but they should be identified as a crucial political force that both Chiang Kai-shek and the Communist Party (CCP) needed.” It was the middle class who would solidify either the Nationalists or Communists in the cities of China, he said.

This liberal middle class of urban doctors, lawyers, educators, and businessmen held political ideals similar to that of America, and many of them were educated in America, said Lutze. “But they took democracy seriously and recognized that the Communists legitimately represented important sectors of the population. Chiang Kai-shek made it clear that the Communists, and other opposition voices, would be suppressed—and that he would enforce that decision militarily.” American support for Chiang thus translated into the curtailing of democracy and the expansion of a very unpopular civil war.

In contrast, the Communist Party promised a coalition government that would settle differences through parliamentary means, said Lutze. “This Communist program, called New Democracy, became an attractive alternative to the war-weary liberals, who had endured more than a decade of their country’s devastation during World War II and the ensuing civil war,” he added.

In the early years of the Cold War, America followed a policy set down by the “Truman Doctrine” to contain Communism “whenever and wherever” it rose. In East Asia, the U.S. decided to rebuild Japan, a bitter enemy of China, as a stronghold against a Communist threat in the region, said Lutze. This policy further angered China’s patriotic middle-class liberals. “After 1947, U.S. occupation authorities in Japan moved to re-empower the same elites who had been in charge of the war-time Japanese economy. In China, this new Japan policy infuriated the patriotic democrats, and it fostered anti-Americanism and deeper support for the CCP,” he said.

The book’s title is derived from fellow historian Walter Lafeber and his work, “*Inevitable Revolutions*,” whose title itself was taken from a Bobby Kennedy quote about the insurrections of Central America in the 1970s. “The idea of ‘inevitability’ refers to the result of the systematic drive by the U.S. to achieve global stability - to back anyone who has promised to maintain that stability and support American interests, no matter how anti-democratic or dictatorial,” said Lutze. “In these situations, revolution becomes ‘inevitable’ when other avenues for change are closed off and a viable alternative to the status quo exists.”

Lutze places America’s support of Chiang Kai-shek as one of the first postwar precedents of subsequent U.S. foreign policy decisions to empower foreign leaders not because they stand for democracy but because they will defend American interests. “It is a case of a larger

commitment, whether to the war on communism or the war on terror, that seems to overshadow in specific instances the stated American ideals of democracy and freedom,” said Lutze, citing the recent martial law imposed by U.S.-backed Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, and the jailing of protesting Pakistani lawyers. “It’s ironic that U.S. policy creates anti-American sentiment by angering people who otherwise could ideologically side with Americans,” said Lutze.

A professor with Illinois Wesleyan since 1996, Lutze is the chair of the History Department and has led a half-dozen May Term travel courses and a student research team to China, including this past summer a group supported with the coveted ASIANetwork-Freeman Foundation Student-Faculty Research Grant. He plans another book about the middle class during the Chinese Revolution, broadening the study to include the rural middle class and urban business owners.

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