

# 五

The world was huge  
China could have been Mars  
Confucius and communists  
chopsticks and stars  
chow mein and chop suey  
both came from Chun King  
fortune cookies were made  
in a place called Peking





## Chapter 5 - Red China

WW2 ended in 1945, but the civil war in China continued to rage. Although America and its allies supported Chiang Kai-Shek (蔣介石 Jiǎng Jièshí) and the KMT (國民黨 Guómíndǎng) aka the “Nationalists”, Mao Zedong (毛泽东 Máo Zédōng) was definitely winning among the Chinese masses. There were attempts made to broker a peace between the Communists and the Nationalists in 1945 Chongqing, but neither the Communists nor the KMT were willing to lay down their arms. By 1948, the Communists were clearly in control of most of China and, in 1949, Chiang Kai-Shek asked America, the UK, France, and the USSR to intercede. But by then it was too late. On October 1, 1949, Mao Zedong declared the birth of the People’s Republic of China and two months later, on December 8, 1949, the KMT officially moved its government and nearly 2 million troops and support personnel from Chongqing in Sichuan, to Taipei, Taiwan. The purpose of this move was to regroup, and the plan was to recapture the Chinese mainland from the communists with the help of America and other supportive allies. Of course, that never happened. There was never a peace treaty, nor an armistice signed between the Communists and the Nationalists (KMT.) Taiwan continues to officially call itself the “Republic of China.”

In 1950, the USA became involved in the Korean conflict and fought against both the North Koreans and the Chinese in Korea. But aside from stationing US troops on the island of Taiwan, the US did little to assist the “Republic of China”, now hunkered down in Taiwan, in its goal to recover the mainland.

America, in the 1950’s was in the throes of the Cold War. Communists were our sworn enemies. The USSR (The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) and the People’s Republic of China were considered to be huge threats to the American way of life. The United States was also the biggest financial supporter of the French and the South Vietnamese during their struggle against Ho Chi Minh and the communist North Vietnamese. When the French decided to call Vietnam quits in 1954, the USA was left holding not only the financial weight of that war, but America believed that Vietnam was a communist domino which America could not allow to fall. If Vietnam became communist, Cambodia, Laos, and Burma would be quick to follow.

In actuality, the Peoples Republic of China was having a tough go of it in the 1950’s. Their vision was of a communist China - but what would that mean? For one thing, Mao declared that “Women would hold up half of the sky” (“女人撑起半边天 “Nǚrén chēng qǐ bànbiāntiān). There would also be serious land reform. Large chunks of land were taken from the wealthy landlords and given to the peasants and many land owners were killed in the process. In the beginning, China tried to model itself after the USSR, but relations between these two huge communist powers began to deteriorate. Both human-caused and natural disasters culminating with the Great Leap Forward and the Great Famine led to the deaths of tens of millions during the late 1950’s and early 1960’s, but China had shut itself off from most of the rest of the world at that time, so the West knew very little of the suffering that was happening in “Red China.”

The color red is usually associated with good fortune in China. During the 1950’s however, the “red” in “Red China” was understood to mean “communist” in the West, as in “Communist China” (the People’s Republic of China) as opposed to “Free China,” the term much of the world used when referring to the “legitimate government of China” in Taiwan. In the same way that the USSR was separated from western Europe by the “Iron Curtain,” Red China was separated from the free parts of Southeast Asia by a “Bamboo Curtain” which prevented the free world from seeing what was really happening in The People’s Republic of China.