

Koji Ariyoshi:
**A Japanese-American's Role in China during
the Second World War and The Chinese Revolution**

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SUMMARY

This paper deals with the life of Koji Ariyoshi, an American of Japanese ancestry who was a specialist in psychological warfare assigned to the US Army's Dixie Mission, an observer group based at the headquarters of the Chinese Communist Party in Yanan during the years 1944–1946. As part of his work Ariyoshi traveled back and forth on US military aircraft between Yanan and Chongqing, Chiang Kai-shek's capital and the center of American military and diplomatic activity in China during the mid–1940s.

Ariyoshi, a trained journalist with a labor union background, wrote numerous essays and reports which compared Nationalist China, on a speedy decline into corruption, injustice, and decay, to the new China being born in Yanan under the leadership of Mao Ze-dong and Zhou En-lai.

Ariyoshi's experiences during those crucial years turned him into a lifelong supporter and admirer of the People's Republic of China. During the last years of his life in the 1970s, he became a leader in the movement to have the USA recognize the PRC.

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Introduction

One autumn morning in 1944, seven years after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident which marked the start of Japan's attempt to take over all of China, an American military envoy deplaned at Yanan and was greeted by Mao Ze-dong and other leaders of the Communist Party of China. His name was Koji Ariyoshi, and he was a second generation American of Japanese descent. A specialist in psychological warfare in the war against Japan, Ariyoshi had been dispatched by American authorities in Chiang Kai-shek's capital, Chongqing, to the Communist Party headquarters at Yanan. Initially scheduled to spend one month residing in Yanan, Ariyoshi ultimately spent approximately a year and a half on American government service in Chinese Communist territory.

Later in life, long after the end of World War II, this man, who had come to love China, established the Hawaii-China People's Friendship Association and became its chairman. Ariyoshi played an important role in helping to create a new awareness about China in the USA, which led to the US Government's decision to normalize relations with the People's Republic of China.

Koji Ariyoshi became a labor activist in Hawaii in the 1930s. He joined the US Army as a Japanese interpreter and was sent to the China-Burma-India Theater. In 1944 as a member of the American military's Dixie Mission, so named because its activities took place in the "rebel" part of China, Ariyoshi was assigned to live and work in the capital of the Communist Party of China at Yanan in the rugged mountains of northern Shaanxi Province.

During the McCarthy era of the 1950s after his return to the USA, Ariyoshi was arrested and tried for violating the Smith Act by having communistic, anti-government thoughts. As one of the "Hawaii Seven," his case became known throughout the USA. Ariyoshi revisited China during the 1970s. In October 1976, one month after the death of Mao Ze-dong, Ariyoshi's history-making life came to an end. He was 62 years of age.

Ariyoshi had cultural ties with Japan through his parents, and rose to important positions in the US Army during World War II and in the US Department of State immediately following that war. Through his government work he became familiar with conditions in both Nationalist and Communist China. For these reasons one might think of Ariyoshi's life itself as the living history of modern Sino-Japanese-American relations. Why did he decide to participate in the joint Sino-American war against Japan? What kinds of thoughts did he have while he was fighting against his parents' homeland? Using Ariyoshi's recollections written during his Smith Act trial, his younger days and his activities and

thinking as an adult will be explored.

I. Ariyoshi's Youth—Feelings of Revulsion against Racial Prejudice

Koji Ariyoshi's father, Ikutaro Ariyoshi, was a Japanese of traditional values who migrated from Yoshiki-gun in Yamaguchi Prefecture to work on a sugar plantation in Hawaii during the early years of this century. His mother, nee Haru Iwamoto, followed as a picture bride from Yamaguchi Prefecture to join her new husband in Hawaii. Ikutaro and Haru Ariyoshi became coffee farmers in the Kona district of the island of Hawaii some 280 kilometers (180 miles) from Honolulu. Koji, their second son, was born in 1914. He grew up on a coffee plantation in a society in which Filipinos, Koreans, Japanese and native Hawaiians could all be found working on sugar, pineapple and coffee plantations.

Ariyoshi was reared in a racially charged environment in which poor non-white people directly experienced racial discrimination at the hands of managerial whites. When he was ten years old, his father died, leaving the family deeply in debt to a white landlord, and the Ariyoshi family went through many years marked by financial strains and other difficulties.

From his youngest days, Ariyoshi sympathized with the downtrodden and oppressed. For him, life was a continual struggle of people to improve their conditions. This struggle meant working to help his mother and his siblings repay their debts to their landlord; it meant promoting cooperation and unity between immigrants who had come to Hawaii from various lands in Asia.

During the first two decades of the 20th Century, Japanese-Americans born in the USA automatically received Japanese citizenship, and at the same time were given American citizenship. Upon reaching adulthood, they had to choose to be a citizen of one country or the other, and the great majority of children of Japanese citizens born in the USA opted for American citizenship. For Ariyoshi, the USA felt more like the country to which he belonged than his parents's homeland which he had never seen.

After graduating from high school and before entering the University of Hawaii, in order to assist his family economically, Ariyoshi spent a number of years working as a stevedore and doing other types of physical labor. During this time he came to realize the importance of unity between the people who had come to Hawaii from various lands to work. When the Sino-Japanese War broke out in 1937, Ariyoshi participated in an effort to raise funds to assist people in China who were suffering under the Japanese aggression. He gave talks,

wrote articles for the university newspaper, and collected donations to send to Chinese students who had moved to the interior of China to participate in the war of resistance.

Although Japan was the land of his ancestors, when he learned of the bombing of Chinese cities by Japan and of the Nanjing massacre, Ariyoshi felt that it was just as important to resist attitudes of racial superiority on the part of the Japanese Empire towards China as it was to resist discrimination as practiced in Hawaii by white people towards Asians. Little did Ariyoshi realize at the beginning of China's war against Japanese aggression that before the war came to an end he was to play an important role in it.

When Ariyoshi was ready to begin his senior year of university work, he received a scholarship from a prosperous Chinese-American man and left to finish his studies in the mainland U.S. He decided to attend the University of Georgia in the American South where there were few other Japanese-Americans. The South in the 1940s was an area where racial discrimination was institutionalized, where there was grinding poverty, and where an outsider could easily experience some of the principal contradictions of American society.

Ariyoshi majored in journalism there and earned a B.A. Following graduation he returned to the West Coast where he found employment on the Army docks in San Francisco, well-known for its labor movement. Ariyoshi enjoyed the feeling of comradeship with his fellow workers and became active in the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) in San Francisco.

II. From Relocation Camp to the US Army

In December 1941, Pearl Harbor was attacked and the US went to war against Japan. Because of his Japanese ancestry, Ariyoshi was allowed to continue working only when under surveillance by a soldier armed with a bayonet-affixed rifle. In April 1942, Koji Ariyoshi was forcibly sent to the interior of California where he was placed in the War Relocation Authority's camp at Manzanar. While at Manzanar he became friendly with his wife-to-be, Taeko, a Japanese-American from California, and their wedding ceremony took place inside the camp behind barbed wire.

At Manzanar, there were both supporters of the Japanese Imperial system, as well as Japanese-Americans who were working for increased democracy within the American context and who felt that Japanese Emperor-worship should be denounced. The Nisei were in a difficult position. Ariyoshi felt strongly that the Imperial system offered little for the future of Japanese-Americans, and he be-

came a leader in the camp movement against Japanese imperialism.

In November 1942, a US Army recruiter visited the relocation camp in an attempt to enlist interpreters. Although Ariyoshi did not possess a good command of the Japanese language, he at least had an edge over the Caucasian applicants, and he was accepted for army duty as a candidate for interpreter training. He left Manzanar for a year of study at a US Army facility in the Midwest where he graduated at the top of his class. In December 1943, he was selected to be the leader of a psychological warfare unit composed of ten Nisei interpreters. The group was shipped out to the China-Burma-India Theater where their main tasks were interrogating prisoners of war, broadcasting by loudspeakers to Japanese troop units, composing Japanese language fliers which were to be dropped from the air and which explained the errors of the Japanese Army, and otherwise attempting to break down the enemy's will to fight.

In the border area where northeast India meets Burma, Ariyoshi met his first Japanese prisoner of war. Seven years later Ariyoshi wrote about that experience as follows:

The first prisoner of war I met on the Burma border in the spring of 1944 had two deep bayonet gashes on his throat, and his tongue, half bitten off, was swollen and bleeding. He had inflicted these wounds upon himself in two suicide attempts.

"Do you still want to die?" I asked him.

"No, I want to live if the Americans will let me."

"Why did you attempt suicide?" I asked him, although we assumed from the reports we read that practically all Japanese prisoners of war tried to take their lives.

"Because," the POW answered, "to be a prisoner is the supreme disgrace of an imperial soldier."

Sgt. Kenji Yasui and I talked to him, paying close observation to his views and sentiments. The prisoner was a Japanese peasant who had been physically and psychologically drilled to become a fearless and ruthless automaton, with "Yamato spirit" and the "Code of Bushido."

He had no deep social philosophy. His thinking had been restricted and simplified by the Japanese militarists and their big financial backers. And such shackling of the people's rights to speak and listen, to read and write and to hold and advocate non-

conforming political views was necessary for the warring elements to eliminate opposition to the invasion of Manchuria, to the war of aggression in China proper, southeast Asia and the Pacific.

Back on the West Coast of the USA, the officer who had given the order to place all Japanese-Americans and Japanese in relocation camps had said, "A Jap is a Jap." However, when interviewing his first Japanese POW, Ariyoshi had become aware of how different the Japanese soldiers were from the Japanese-Americans. Their forebears were from the same country, but their upbringing, education, life experiences differed greatly. One big difference was the feelings of racial superiority in the POWs. Ariyoshi was opposed to discrimination on the part of white people towards Asians. In the same way, he opposed Asian people discriminating against or feeling superior to other Asians and wished to work to eliminate these attitudes.

Ariyoshi wrote:

This soldier still clung to emperor worship. The "Imperial Way" to him was the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere," and "Asia for the Asiatics." The "Imperial Way" was actually camouflaged international profiteering and banditry. Not aware of this, the soldier had made his supreme and heroic sacrifices for the emperor.

The inculcation of emperor worship in him and other soldiers by the Japanese imperialists to the point of blind fanaticism stopped their minds from questioning the conditions of poverty, landlordism, tenancy, low wages and unemployment. They had been told to sacrifice everything for the "Imperial Way" and the "Co-Prosperity Sphere."

At this time, Ariyoshi's unit heard of a Japanese political refugee in China who had re-educated Japanese POWs and was using them for psychological warfare on the front lines. Ariyoshi spoke to a State Department official, who was one of General Joseph Stilwell's political advisors, about the advantages and necessity of re-educating Japanese prisoners of war.

"Why not use POWs in psychological warfare to save lives?" "Why not remold them with democratic ideas? A defeated Japan would need such people to proceed along democratic reconstruction." ".....And the POWs needed a

new faith after their illusion of the 'Imperial Way' had been crushed. They must not be left alone to turn back to militarism at some future time."

In June 1944 the director of the American Office of War Information in China paid a visit to the Burma front to observe the psychological warfare operation. This visitor reported that the Kuomintang government had finally lifted its ban on Nisei soldiers entering China. Soon after, Ariyoshi left on his first trip into China.

III. Kuomintang China

Koji Ariyoshi recorded these first impressions of China: (In quoting Ariyoshi older spellings of Chinese names are retained.)

Only a few times have I been moved so deeply by the sight of land as I was when I saw China for the first time from the sky. As we descended from high altitude after flying over the Himalayas, I saw scarred land down below, showing every mark of human toil.

From the sky there was so much beauty on the face of the good earth that peasants tilled to make productive. Yet when I went out to visit the rice fields and farms around Kunming in the short time we stayed there during the early summer of 1944, I saw a picture of poverty and struggling humanity which in many ways made me recall the lean years we farmers spent on coffee farms in Kona.

But here the conditions were much worse, with a brutal share-cropping system where the landlords took from 50 to 60 per cent of the crop for land rent alone. I had little to do then so I watched the peasants toil from early dawn to nightfall. When I went into the city of Kunming I saw pompous, porky and smooth-skinned landlords drinking and dining and wasting food.

All this reminded me of the feudal Japan which my parents had left to work in the sugar cane plantations in Hawaii as contract laborers. Mother frequently told us stories of planting rice in paddies, of the high land rent, of the teahouses which the well-to-do patronized and of the daughters of poor peasants who were sold to the teahouses so that the families would be able to pay their debts to landlords.....

I frequently heard GIs and officers say that there were too

many Indians or Chinese. Their remarks were directed at the poor. If one went out to the countryside to investigate, he would have found that the poor in this semi-feudal economy actually produced the wealth and the rich took away the harvest of their hard toil. There were too many absentee landlords feasting in the cities. There weren't too many Chinese or too many Indians. There was not an equitable distribution of the fruits of labor.

In face of all this misery, I often thought to myself that individual advancement means nothing. An individual would play a constructive role by devoting his best efforts, although limited, to bettering the livelihood of the masses.

When we arrived in China, our limited troops at forward Chinese air bases were being evacuated as we gave up airfields in the face of Japanese attacks. We heard evacuated GIs grumbling that the American press did not give them the truth about the fighting in China. They told us that the Chinese Nationalists were not fighting and had been sitting out the war from about 1940.

Ariyoshi became troubled by the injustices he saw in Chiang Kai-shek's China.

Many peasants had been dragged into the army by local landlord elements, with hands bound so they could not escape. There were, too, many recruits who were brought to the American training center in Kunming who had been impressed into military service in this manner.

But porky landlords' sons and young, slick-haired speculators in the cities were never drafted. Soldiering was the most degrading profession in China and the poorest were impressed into it.

What were they fighting for? Did they know? These and other questions made me observe the peasants in uniform closely.

The first time Ariyoshi had heard of Wataru Kaji was while Ariyoshi was on duty at the Burma front. Ariyoshi harbored a strong desire to meet Kaji and to learn of his efforts at using psychological warfare against troops "deeply indoctrinated in emperor worship and bushido." In Chongqing, Ariyoshi met with Kaji and his wife, Yuki Ikeda, on a number of occasions. However, by mid-

1944, Kaji and Ikeda were no longer being allowed to convert Japanese troops and were being maintained in Chongqing as window dressing for Chiang Kai-shek.

IV. At the Forefront of Sino-American Diplomacy

In the latter part of October 1944, Technical Sergeant Koji Ariyoshi received orders to report for duty in the “rebel area of China.” His assignment there was to survey the highly successful techniques used by the Chinese communists to convert Japanese soldiers.

At the time of Ariyoshi’s arrival in Yanan, China was divided into three principal sections:

- 1) The Kuomintang areas under the control of Chiang Kai-shek. Chiang’s capital was at Chongqing, and the Kuomintang areas were generally located in central, western and southern China.
- 2) The communist areas under the control of Mao Ze-dong. The communist capital was located at Yanan, and most of the regions under communist control were spread across north central China.
- 3) The “puppet” areas under the control of the Japanese Army. These included the eastern portions of China ruled from Nanjing and the “independent” country of Manchuria.

In general at any given time each of the three regions was in a state of conflict with the other two. The Empire of Japan was at war with both the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party. Technically the Kuomintang and the Communists were united in a common front against Japan. However, as Koji Ariyoshi knew better than most Americans, the Chongqing government was maintaining an armed blockade of the area surrounding Yanan and had been preventing people from traveling into that region.

Chiang had grasped the situation in his oft-quoted words recorded by Theodore White, “The Japanese are a disease of the skin; the Communists are a disease of the heart.”

In 1944, each of the three parties in conflict had its own highest priorities. For the leaders of the Kuomintang, their greatest concerns centered around preventing the increasing influence of the Communist Party; for the Communists, their highest priority was the removal of the Japanese Army from China. However, at the same time they also felt a sense of urgency about preventing their erstwhile enemies in the Kuomintang from profiting from the current situation. The Japanese Empire was in a state of war with both the Kuomintang

and the Chinese Communist Party, but their greatest feelings of hatred and fear were directed towards the communists.

From the American perspective, the defeat of the Japanese Empire was the most pressing matter. It took Americans who were quite politically astute to ascertain what was actually occurring in China both in the short run and the long run.

There were three basic reasons for the decision of the American military to cooperate with the Chinese Communist Party at Yanan. The first was to assist the crews of American military aircraft which had been shot down and which crashed in Communist-controlled territory. The second was to establish weather forecasting operations in Communist areas. The third was to cooperate with the Chinese Communist Party in planning psychological warfare operations.

V. Ariyoshi's Duties and the Anti-War Activities of Japanese in Yanan

Through Ariyoshi's assignment to learn about and assist the Communists in their psychological warfare against the Japanese, he soon was in contact with various anti-Japanese groups based in Yanan. Upon his arrival at Yanan, Ariyoshi was able to exchange greetings with Mao Ze-dong, Zhou En-lai, Zhu De and other leaders. At that time both Japanese and Koreans could be found residing in that city. Of special interest to Ariyoshi personally as well as to his superiors in Chongqing, Burma, Honolulu, Washington, and other locations was a certain Japanese person living in Yanan.

Ariyoshi wrote in an autobiographical essay, "The Remoulder of Samurai Minds:"

The Japanese national who undoubtedly contributed most in the war against Japanese militarism is Sanzo Nosaka. Even before I met him in the late fall of 1944 in Yanan, I had heard American officials say that the Japanese militarists would sacrifice a division merely to get him.

He had a firm face with soft eyes, and as we shook hands, I felt an air of reserve about him, but definite warmth in him..... He was a soft-spoken man with an easy smile. He quickly impressed me as a strong, dedicated person. His fight against the Japanese militarists had involved deadly risks of underground work in and around Japan. He escaped from Japan in 1930 or 1931. Practically all his colleagues in the Communist Party leadership were in prison

because of thought control and other repressive laws.

The Japanese Communists were the most militant foes of "Rising Sun" militarism and just as it happened in Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy, the Communists in Japan were the first to suffer repression.

As our ally we stood to benefit by our contact with him. A State Department expert on Japanese affairs once told me that Nosaka, more than anyone else, knew of occurrences in Japan and could interpret events and changing conditions in the enemy territory quite accurately.....

Ariyoshi continued:

We Americans wanted their criticism of our leaflets produced in Chungking and on the Burma front, because we wanted to improve our propaganda material. I took samples of them as they gave their evaluation of our leaflets.

The criticisms and suggestions were well taken by our psychological warfare units in Chungking and Burma. They in turn sent out copies of the evaluations to psychological warfare units in Honolulu, Saipan, Washington, and later, in the Philippines. The suggestions prepared by the prisoner converts proved helpful and from all of these places I began receiving samples of leaflets dropped over Japanese lines and in Japan, asking that they be evaluated and criticized by the prisoner converts.....

I was also asked to have Nosaka's propagandists listen to OWI [Office of War Information] broadcasts beamed to Japan and to get their reaction. In the same manner that they criticized and made suggestions to improve our leaflets, they listened to radio programs in a cave and then held long evaluation sessions.

On many occasions I asked the prisoner converts about their postwar outlook. They said they were returning to Japan to reconstruct the defeated nation along democratic lines. They said they hoped that the wartime cooperation of the major powers would continue and that we all would work together on a common ground and with a common purpose to make Japan a peaceful nation.....

In another essay, Ariyoshi wrote:

A few days after I arrived in Yanan, Sanzo Nosaka, who directed the prisoner re-education project, took me..... to the headquarters of the Japanese Workers and Peasants School. As we walked halfway up the hill with an ancient pagoda perched on top, a group of Japanese dressed in faded blue, home-spun uniforms, puttees and rope sandals like those of the 18th Group (Communist) Army, met us.

These men were cadres — re-educated prisoners of war who were now teachers and officials of the school and the Japanese People's Emancipation League, an anti-Japanese militarist organization.....

None of the POWs was referred to as a prisoner; all were students. This was the policy of the Chinese Communists.

A group of students came out of a cave and saluted Nosaka. These were new students who had recently fallen captive and been sent to the rear for re-education.

Nosaka spoke informally and softly to the new students, and I took notes. He said: "You are undergoing a very difficult period of re-adjustment. When you were captured some of you must have considered suicide because of disgrace. Let me tell you that it is not a shame to fall into an antagonist's hands. Rather it is a great loss if you do not live to serve in rebuilding a new Japan. Consider that all of you have died once; then you have nothing to lose."

Koji Ariyoshi who later was to become a major figure in the Sino-American friendship movement of the 1970s had developed during his Yanan experiences into a trusted friend of the Chinese Communist leadership. Following General Patrick Hurley's personal attacks on the leading State Department envoy at Yanan, John S. Service, and Service's abrupt recall to the US in 1945, Ariyoshi appears to have become the most accepted American representative in Yanan.

Conclusion

During the Sino-Japanese War, as a member of the American military forces in China lending assistance to both the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party, Koji Ariyoshi was in a privileged position which allowed him

to compare conditions under both parties. He grew to despise the social and political injustices in Kuomintang areas, and became deeply attracted to the new China being born in Yanan. Ariyoshi's lifelong support for the People's Republic of China and his work to build Sino-American friendship grew out his experiences in wartime Yanan.

Ariyoshi's entire life, from his difficult childhood years, through his years of agricultural work and manual labor, university studies, relocation camp, work in China, was spent tirelessly fighting against racial superiority, exploitation and injustice and striving to make a better life for working people. Into his various activities Ariyoshi brought an original set of views tempered by his experiences as a member of a racial and ethnic minority in the USA and as someone who had grown up in rural poverty and who had helped strengthen the labor union movement. In contrast to the many Americans who had been sent to China during World War II and who had often found Chinese peasants disagreeable or worse, Ariyoshi felt a need to build bonds of solidarity and understanding.

Had the efforts of persons such as Ariyoshi and Service not been thwarted, perhaps postwar Sino-Japanese and Sino-American relations might not have passed through the long, dark period of bad feelings and confrontation of the 1950s and 1960s.

Note

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In this list may be found Koji Ariyoshi's own writings, works which directly describe parts of Ariyoshi's life, and / or works by people who knew Ariyoshi personally. It should not be considered exhaustive; it is intended simply to provide interested readers with some key sources to find out more about Ariyoshi and his times.

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