

## TIMOTHY GLEASON

### **Asia in *LIFE*: The Magazine's Representation of "Its Troubles and Opportunities"**

In recent decades, iconic photography of the 1950s has come under criticism for its portrayal of the normal American family and its naïve representations of human existence. *LIFE* and the 1955 Family of Man exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art have especially received attention.<sup>1</sup> For example, Wendy Kozol writes that *LIFE* “envisioned the nation in terms of the white, middle-class, heterosexual, nuclear family.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, *LIFE*'s “special issue” of 31 December 1951 on “Asia: Its Troubles and Opportunities” invites close examination. It was a magazine owned by a powerful white man, run by many white men, and this issue features an attractive, young Asian woman on the cover. In addition, it appeared at a time when many Americans were suspicious of Asians because of their experience with Japan during World War II and the heightened conflict in Korea.

The Korean conflict had been featured on three previous covers and was the impetus for *LIFE*'s special coverage. The issue was not focused solely on Korea, however, so what was it really about? This article endeavours to investigate the relationship between the images, stories and advertisements to discover what type of representation of Asia *LIFE* was trying to provide. The method section of this article discusses how the images, stories and advertisements will be

analysed. An analysis section provides a description of the content and interpretations. The conclusion argues that this special issue displayed the good and bad that *LIFE* offered its readers.

### **Historical Theory and Method**

This article identifies three significant layers of historical analysis, which are three ways to look at the same subject, and it should be noted this method is experimental.<sup>3</sup> First, there is the Developmental layer, which addresses the traditional practice of journalism. Second, a Political Economy layer examines the political economy of American relations with Asian nations. Third, a Critical/Cultural layer looks at the magazine as a readable text embedded in an historical context. These approaches will be used to examine the representations *LIFE* made of Asia in an effort to answer several questions.<sup>4</sup> First, how does the magazine portray Asia? Is it represented as a singular entity, or as a regional aggregate of different countries and ethnicities? Second, how is Asia positioned in relation to the political economy of the United States? Third, how does the content of this issue compare with regular issues of *LIFE* published before and after the Asia issue? Together these three approaches should offer a more comprehensive interpretation than any single approach.

#### *Developmental*

The Developmental layer of analysis questions how *LIFE* constructed its issues before and after the special issue on Asia was published. The purpose is to see if the special issue resembles other issues from a basic content and design standpoint. James D. Startt and Wm. David Sloan identified the Developmental approach as one of the six “schools” of “interpretation” in mass communication historiography: Nationalist, Romantic, Developmental, Progressive, Consensus, and Cultural.<sup>5</sup>

The Developmental School produced some of the most notable histories of journalism. Its origins are in the late nineteenth century when journalism was becoming professionalised. “It is based on the concept of the professional development of the press, viewing the history of journalism as the continuing evolution of journalistic practices and standards.”<sup>6</sup> Developmental historians represented journalism as a growing, respectable profession, and one that was capable of participating in the improvement of society. The school’s most notable historians and their significant works were Frederic Hudson’s *Journalism in the United States, from 1690 to 1872*; James Melvin Lee’s *History of American Journalism*; Willard G. Bleyer’s *Main Currents in the History of American Journalism*; and Frank Luther Mott’s *American Journalism; A History of Newspapers in the United States Through 150 Years: 1690 to 1940*.<sup>7</sup> Developmental historians such as Hudson viewed the past as a logical path to the present in a determinative chain of events. They admired the newspapers that contributed to the contemporary conditions of the press, but they were not as kind to those who followed a different or obstructionist path.<sup>8</sup>

The methodological significance for this article is that the Developmental approach assists in creating a foundational history, which is one that explains what the typical *LIFE* issue was when the Asian special issue appeared in 1951. This approach will be used to explain the content before and after this special issue hit the news-stands.

### *Political Economy*

The Political Economy layer considers those political and economic factors influencing coverage. These factors can be external and internal. This section will look at the external political factors in Asia that attracted the interest of *LIFE* and the public in general. The internal factors are the top-down management issues that influenced the framing of editorial content.

The Political Economy approach offers a critical perspective of the media's role in society, or a publication or technological adoption within the smaller sphere of the media industry. Anthony Fung describes Political Economy as "the study of the process of cultural production and distribution of media messages in a society entwined with both economic constraints of the market and political constraints of the authority under a specific economic and political context."<sup>9</sup> Fung positions media messages as cultural products that need to be analysed almost as a commodity. His tying of economics and politics together distinguishes Political Economy from media economics, which tends to be more about business reportage. The field of media economics is often concerned with a company's expenses and earnings, without much concern for the social conditions that labourers have to work in.<sup>10</sup>

The application of the Political Economy approach to this study will aid in understanding the social climate of Asia as it pertained to the United States in 1951. It will assist in answering questions such as these: Why was *LIFE* so concerned about Asia? Did it see the special issue as an informational source for the public to position Asian countries, or was it a profit-driven venture? What resources were given to photographers and editors to cover their stories?

An example of an internal structure and Political Economy's relationship with Developmental history is the editing of the magazine. *LIFE* used staff members and freelance journalists to create content, but decisions as to what and how content would appear were made by the editors. This practice was part of journalism's Developmental history and was routine during this era, and it is a Political Economy issue because journalists often exchange their rights to control how a story or photograph will appear in print for a salary or fee. So this study does not distinguish between staffers and freelancers because their work still had to go through the editors' gate-keeping practices to maintain a consistent appearance.

### *Critical/Cultural*

The Critical/Cultural layer is a reading, as text, of the magazine's editorial and advertising content, and of the public responses expressed in circulation and letters to the editor. This layer relies on the interpretative skills and bias of the author. Naturally, the reading is based on the available evidence and the historical context.

For cultural historian Warren Susman, the meaning behind the facts is of great importance: "The historian searches not only for truth but also meaning. In that process the very words the historian uses become symbols themselves."<sup>11</sup> A Critical/Cultural history allows for a greater degree of interpretation than traditional cultural historians might have exercised themselves. Since researchers have experience in reading texts, a cautious Critical/Cultural historian can elaborate from bare facts.

A Critical/Cultural layer is a reception-oriented analysis of history in two ways. One way, which is the more primary and significant manner, is to determine how the public interpreted their experience from *LIFE*. Reading letters written to the editor assists in this endeavour—even given that the published letters represent an editor's selection. Sales of issues also help to indicate the level of interest, although sales statistics alone cannot identify the meaning behind the interest. Sales coupled with the public's interest in Asian fashion, design or languages, might become cultural indicators of popularity. In collaboration with Political Economy, the Critical/Cultural approach might look at other representations of feelings toward Asians, such as laws targeting Asians or occupational representations of Asians in film.

The other way to use Critical/Cultural analysis for this study is a reading of the content itself. How are Asians portrayed in the photographs? How do they compare to those of people in advertisements? This technique was used by Kozol and comes with some risk when used on its

own. Kozol makes her argument decoding the images with seemingly little knowledge of the production process of magazines or editing. She often mistakenly attributes *LIFE*'s consistent subject-matter to photographers, rather than to the relationship between photographers and editors. Advertisements are discussed in this study not because they are the same as editorial content, but because advertisements are typically placed near editorial content where they can make an impact. Additionally, while readers understand the difference between advertisements and editorial content, they experience them together.

The three approaches work together by integrating the findings together in the report. Evidence is drawn not only from the special issue of *LIFE*, which is the focus, but from issues of *LIFE* appearing before and after this issue, and from issues of popular magazines and newspapers published at the same time as the *LIFE* issues.

### **Description and Analysis**

This section examines the context from which the Asia special issue appeared, the editorial and advertising content, and analyses this content. A description of the magazine precedes the analysis since it is important for readers to understand what appeared in the special issue. The analytical detail is based on both the internal evidence of the issue itself and external evidence.

#### *Description*

“Asia: Its Troubles and Opportunities,” dated 31 December 1951, was probably a product of *LIFE*'s publisher Henry Luce's interest in this region. He had been born in China to missionaries, and was suspicious of Communism. According to Daniel Marshall Haygood:

[Luce] believed that it was America's duty and obligation to spread the ideals of democracy, freedom, and capitalism around the world to other countries, especially countries in the poorest regions of the world. In Luce's view, these countries, particularly

the poor Asian countries, did not have the ability or the will to extract themselves from their myriad of problems such as poverty, illiteracy, and disease among others.<sup>12</sup>

When the issue appeared on magazine racks and doormats, World War II had been over for less than a decade, only about 7,000 Koreans lived in the United States, and the United Nations had been active in Korea for little more than a year. A brief look at trivia and other events helps to put 1951 into context.<sup>13</sup> In the United States during that year colour television was introduced, Alan Freed coined the term rock'n'roll, and Yul Brynner appeared in the Asian-inspired film *The King and I*. Angst and rebellion were present in major literary and research works published, such as Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, and Herman Wouk's *The Caine Mutiny*. *An American in Paris* won the Oscar for the best picture released that year, and Doris Day sang the popular song *Shanghai*.

*LIFE* had already devoted a number of previous covers to Asia, some of which were about the Korean War. On 17 July 1950, the cover carried a David Douglas Duncan photograph of an American jet pilot. On 30 July 1950, *LIFE* published a Carl Mydans' shot from the Korean front. On 4 September 1950, Duncan had another cover image, of American troops in action. On 28 May 1951, Hank Walker's photograph of a falling paratrooper made the cover. On 2 July 1951, *LIFE* published an Arnold Newman image of Sergeant John A. Pittman, who received a medal. Military images from Japan had previously appeared in 1937, 1939 and 1940. Later, Vietnam made the cover of *LIFE*, in 1961 and between 1963 and 1972, which was the last year *LIFE* was published as a weekly magazine.

The special issue is quite different from most *LIFE* issues because of the space allotted to Asia. This focus does not suggest the content differs ideologically from other *LIFE* issues with stories and images about Asia, but that the ideology might be more evident or consistent because the content can be evaluated more efficiently in one single issue. Although it can be resisted, the

ideology has more force because there are not competing subjects in the issue. So a benefit of analysing a special issue is that the individual pieces, stories and photographs, can be looked at in the context of the whole package.

Its cover differs from the Korean covers even though war photojournalist Duncan made the image. On the cover a young woman looks over the right shoulder of the viewer. She holds an umbrella in her right hand. The blades of the green umbrella encircle her, and this umbrella becomes the background. The familiar white letters spelling out *LIFE* appear in the usual upper-left hand corner framed by a red rectangle, and the bottom has a red band across the page with the date and price of twenty cents written inside in white. Context for the image is provided adjacent to the table of contents:

Mitsuko Kimura, 19, lives in the outskirts of Tokyo. Her house is a ramshackle affair built from the rubble after her original home was twice burned out in B-29 fire raids. Mitsuko works as model and movie extra, is an ardent English student. To David Douglas Duncan, who photographed the story that begins on page 58, Mitsuko embodies many of the graceful and appealing ways of traditional Japan.<sup>14</sup>

“ASIA: Its Troubles and Opportunities” is printed on the left side of the page, while “SPECIAL ISSUE” is printed on the right side. The happy cover-image is in stark contrast to the words “Its troubles,” but more fitting with the “Opportunities” to Kimura’s right. The timing of the issue, at the turn of the year, conveys the idea that Asia’s future was uncertain.

The December covers leading up to the special issue were rather light in tone. Those issues featured Christmas lingerie, the evolution of President Truman’s wardrobe, in colour, actors Vivien Leigh and Laurence Olivier, and Tintoretto’s art in colour. Covers from January of 1952 featured hairstyles, the painter Augustus John, a portrait of Ike Eisenhower, and a talented girl, all of which were grayscale images.

To return to the special issue, the table of contents lists twenty stories. Not all stories,

images and advertisements are addressed in this discussion section due to limitations of space and lack of significance.<sup>15</sup> Stories that would reinforce points established by analysing other stories—and which are thus redundant—are not presented. The opening story, “Three Views of Asia,” is accompanied by maps of Asia seen from “Russia view,” from Asia to the U.S.S.R. view, and from the historic human passage perspective.<sup>16</sup> Across from this story, on the preceding left-hand page, is an advertisement from Squibb. It contains a blithe photograph of a cat rubbing its head against a young child seated in a high-chair. A small illustration in the bottom-right corner is of a soldier giving blood or medicine to an injured colleague. These images compete for our attention with the map. Depending on personal experience and attitude, the reader will probably enter into the “Three Views of Asia” story thinking about either the child and cat or the injured soldier. These are starkly different scenes and the lingering memory of these images will interact with the initial exposure to “Asia.”

Although a lighter look at Asia is included in the later pages of *LIFE*, the immediacy of the Asian danger to the Westerner (portrayed as white people), is quickly on display. Duncan, a now-famous photojournalist, reports with pictures and words on the different parts of Asia in the story placed next in the issue, “Decline of the Westerner.”<sup>17</sup> He writes, “the Communists have exploited the fire lit by the Japanese—that Asia should be run by Asians,” which is a position the magazine counters by the editorial suggestion that Asians would run it “badly.”<sup>18</sup> The Asian peoples’ right to self-determination is sickly, according to Duncan and *LIFE*. “The peoples of Indo-China, or Viet Nam, are infected with revolt against the French and their weak emperor.”<sup>19</sup> Iran is criticised for the nationalisation of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, and for having trouble determining how to transport and sell oil to customers around the world. Duncan remarks that the managers of the operation “are about the most soberly conservative men I have met in a

long time.”<sup>20</sup> With hindsight the remark as to their conservative nature rings loudly for Americans who remember the Iranian hostage crisis, but it gets washed aside because of Americans’ disinterest in conflicts that brew slowly rather than erupt.

*LIFE* follows “Decline of the Westerner” with the stories “Rise of Red Star” by Robert Neville, “What Asians Think of U.S. Policy,” and “Why We Fight and Hope.”<sup>21</sup> Neville and *LIFE* represent China as treacherous and brilliant: “With strong and bloody hands they have achieved ... a ‘degree of unification never before known in Chinese history.’” Their “genius” is demonstrated in how they “have attacked and stalemated the first United Nations army, a mainly American force, and a good one.”<sup>22</sup> China is not just “China,” but “Red China.” This use of “Red” carries into the narrative: “It is a Red political device to stir up the countryside and keep the peasantry forever under subjection.”<sup>23</sup> “Red” already had connotations in the States, where the *Red Channels* was published—a pamphlet claiming the people listed in it were Communists who had not been blacklisted from working in Hollywood—and Senator Joseph McCarthy had begun his hunt for Communists, which became known as McCarthyism.

Neville does offer an important insight in one paragraph pertaining to the declining relations between the Soviets and China. He reports, “The reader who pores long and hard over reams of Chinese Communist propaganda will now search in vain for references to Soviet aid, let alone Soviet generosity.”<sup>24</sup> Like Duncan’s comment on conservative Iranians, it is a smart and significant observation that with hindsight begs for greater attention.

The photographs for this story show labouring Chinese, Tibetans at a Chinese government celebration held not far from the Dalai Lama’s palace, the burning of landlords’ title deeds, a mass public trial, the people’s militia, and a volunteer soldier receiving Mao’s autograph. The images are not spectacular, but they serve as illustrations to reinforce the article.

“What Asians Think of U.S. Policy” and “Why We Fight and Hope” take views on American foreign policy. The three Asians *LIFE* uses as spokesmen for Asia are a professor in Beirut, an editor of a newspaper in India, and an Indonesian statesman. *LIFE*'s readers learn that the United States was equated with freedom before the end of World War II. However, this view changed when the United States did not help Arab refugees in the Jerusalem area, and instead supported Israel and France's colonial policies. Once again, the reader is warned of a problem that will continue to grow. According to professor Nabih Amin Faris, “Consequently, Arab and Moslem leaders and masses have become convinced that the U.S., *not* Britain, is now their enemy and the only obstacle to the realization of their hopes. If this seems an unfair interpretation the fact remains that this is the picture seen through Arab eyes.” For newspaper editor, Frank Moraes, “The U.S. sees security in terms of guns and money.... Communism is essentially an economic problem. Alleviate the economic ills and you remove the very conditions in which Communism thrives.” He adds, “By [the U.S.] exalting private enterprise and the individual she makes the acquisition of wealth for wealth's sake an end in itself. This, of course, is not true. But it is how the American scene presents itself to the general Asiatic gaze.”<sup>25</sup> “What Asians Think of U.S. Policy” is a startling exposé of the lessons not heeded by American leaders during the preceding fifty years. The recommendations are too lengthy to reprint here, but they provide ample warning of the goodwill being lost because of American foreign policy.

The neighbouring editorial, “Why We Fight and Hope,” asks “whether Asia ought to be considered as a single unit at all.” It argues that journalistically to cover Asia as a whole is different from treating it as a whole through foreign policy. *LIFE* claims Asians want to be wanted, and want to be loved. Instead, the U.S. has adopted the arduous task of the policeman. “The whole equation is far more complicated than most Americans have been willing to

believe.”<sup>26</sup> *LIFE* advises Asia to learn how to become wealthy instead of asking for so much of American wealth to be transferred to Asian countries. The editorial recommends the U.S. should recognise and correct its errors, especially over Palestine, and should oppose Communism wherever it appears in Asia.

The importance of the Westerner is visible in “Medical Missionary,” which tells the story of Dr. Edwin B. McDaniel, an American doctor in Thailand sent by the Overbrook Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia and the First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood.<sup>27</sup> “He and the 532 other medical missionary workers in Asia are among the most respected Americans on that continent.” The attempts at Christian conversion are glossed over in “Medical Missionary:” “Overbrook leaves evangelism mostly to Siamese Christians while Dr. McDaniel concentrates on medical tasks.”

Japan becomes the model Asian country in “The Example of Japan.”<sup>28</sup> David Douglas Duncan provides most of the photographs for this story, as well as the cover image. The article tells of traditional Japanese home designs that are becoming popular in the West, the strength of landscape gardening, Zen Buddhist monks (“Warrior Monk Today Meditates”), scrolls and wood-block prints, and the dance and drama of Noh and Kabuki plays. Duncan’s photographs are colourful and interesting, of higher quality than most of the photographs in the issue. The text offers a quick overview of the different topics, and the photographs are what draw the reader to the story. It is difficult to select any one image to discuss because there are a number that are informative and well constructed from an aesthetic standpoint. One of the most interesting shots is of a grandmother putting her granddaughters to bed in a very simple and “uncluttered space.”<sup>29</sup> In another photograph printed below, the room is seen from a different perspective as a dining room. The two images show the multifunctionality of the room. The peacefulness and serenity of

the bedroom image comes from the minimal lighting, child at rest, body position of the grandmother, and orderly lines of windows, doors and trim.

### *Analysis*

Several points deserve analytical attention. First, how does this issue differ from other contemporary issues? Second, how does the editorial content relate to the advertising content? Third, how can the content be interpreted in a proper historical context? These issues are discussed by looking at adjacent issues, American consumerism and Asia, and the political triad of the West, Asia and “Red” countries. As a reminder, the purpose of this issue as described by *LIFE* was to explain why family and friends care about Asia and why the rest of America should be concerned about it.

This issue contained less advertising than most issues of *LIFE*. A review of issues months away from the Asia issue demonstrates that they carried more advertisements. However, the issues of December 1951 leading up to this New Year’s Eve issue contained fewer and fewer advertisements. Based on reviews of a variety of issues, it appears *LIFE* tended to contain fewer advertisements the closer the publication date was to the Christmas and New Year holiday. The kinds of advertisements published were not noticeably different from issue to issue. Types of advertisements did not appear to be placed beside stories for particular reasons (contrary to expectation, because, for instance, modern women’s magazines place stories mentioning a product near an advertisement for that product). The Asia issue contained fewer pages than the regular issues, but this would be expected because it contained less advertising.

The popular in-depth photo story did not appear in the Asia issue, which was a break with their style. While many of the photographs were good, they did not compose a visual narrative. Nor were many photographs exceptional. The cover photo was one of the better images, as

would be expected, but outside of a handful of images the quality dropped noticeably. This was one of the more disappointing aspects of the special issue. If there was one area that readers expected *LIFE* to excel in, it was photography.

Contrasting worlds are portrayed in this issue. On one hand, a consumer world is represented in the advertising. The white, middle-class America that Kozol identified, as mentioned in the introduction, is the target market. *LIFE*'s apparent goal for Asia was to make its people similar consumers. On the other hand, much of Asia is portrayed as being undeveloped from an American capitalist viewpoint. The advertisements' presence reinforces the American ideal of consumption and the editorial content does not challenge this as a value.

*LIFE*'s editorial content and advertisements often featured attractive young women. A story about pretty Asian actresses fits this tradition, as does the cover image of the attractive actress. The story and images serve to reduce the Otherness of Asia by showing a tangible, cultural aspect.<sup>30</sup> It was, in part, what *LIFE* did best. The magazine was certainly a master of providing cheesecake images while not appearing solely interested in sexuality. There was often a backdrop of respectability to the images that made women the object of the lusting gaze. In this case, readers might not feel as if the women were being objectified because they are learning something about Asia and thus expanding their boundaries of cultural understanding. The package is one that is definitely advertising-friendly and hard to find objectionable by standards of the day—only two years before Marilyn Monroe appeared in *Playboy*.

A story deserving greater attention in order to understand how *LIFE* thought of Asia and the Westerner is “Medical Missionary.” *LIFE* praised the work of Dr. Edwin McDaniel. The story is about the doctor who heals the locals while a native tries to convert the patient to Christianity. *LIFE* does not challenge the ethics of converting the native population because the

doctor is not directly trying to convert them. *LIFE* could have suggested that Dr. McDaniel had undue influence over his patients because they would be in a state of duress, but it does not provide the reader that option. Upon reflection, this unquestioning support for religious imperialism might have contributed to additional medical activities in Asia. For example, American Baptist Missionary Paul Lewis has in recent times been accused of sterilising women of the Akha Tribe in Burma, and contributing to the sale of their blood. An estimated three thousand or more women may have died from the procedure.<sup>31</sup> Lewis identified a now-deceased Dr. Edwin McDaniel of McCormick Presbyterian Hospital as the advisor to the project. It has not proved possible to confirm that the Dr. McDaniel in the 1951 *LIFE* issue is the same Dr. McDaniel mentioned by missionary Lewis, but it seems likely, based on the name, region and religious affiliation. McCormick Presbyterian Hospital did not respond to a request to confirm McDaniel's identity.

*LIFE* represents the United States as part of a political triad. It identifies the West (largely the United States), developing Asia, and Communists (primarily the Soviets and China) as the main entities concerned with Asia's politics. This relationship is so important that the graphic for "Three Views of Asia" demonstrates the proximity of Soviet Russia to the Asian bloc, and serves to remind the reader of the risk of such proximity. Since developing Asia is reportedly incapable of managing itself, *LIFE* identifies Western democracy and capitalism as the only source of effective governance, and it warns of Soviet influences. The magazine's use of the triad fails to acknowledge, as a reasonable alternative, a democratic governance utilising a socialistic education and health system, or the cultural differences raised in "What Asians Think of U.S. Policy," such as newspaper editor Moraes' criticism of the Americans' valuing of private enterprise and money. The use of the triad also contributes to the homogenisation of Asian

countries as a more singular Asia, because of the focus on the developing Asia and Communist positions, without questioning the price of colonialism on countries like India. A more comprehensive comparison would have required greater explanation by *LIFE*, so few prototypes exist as a result.

The issue does provide insightful but underemphasised warnings about Asia. One of these is the remark by writer and photojournalist Duncan about Iranian authorities being strongly conservative, in the previously mentioned “Decline of the Westerner.” Writer Neville cast another warning in his remark, from “Rise of Red Star,” that Chinese propaganda was lacking its earlier influence on the Soviets. An additional warning was that Muslims were beginning to see the United States as oppressors rather than defenders of freedom. Palestinians were recognised as a people that the United States should not ignore or disfavour, but such concerns over Islam were outside the political economy of mainstream America’s perspective, which focused available attention on the strife in Korea. It seems the American government did not see this as a priority to communicate to the American public.

*LIFE* regularly uses a colour from its limited palette as an adjective to represent a particular form of government. The use of “Red” was common in describing China in order to frame the government as a deviation from the former government and the people of China. Red China connotes the Communist government, while China is more popularly used to describe the people of China and the country as a geographic space. An example is evident in the following passage:

Red China’s rulers show considerable genius for control. They show less genius in the fields of economics and production, despite all their manpower. Since the manpower must be spread from Korea to Tibet, and since it is not the whole key to national strength even in China, the economy of the Communists is not prospering. Actually resurgent China is growing much less than a weak China was growing before World War II. Despite Red boasts that agrarian reform has ‘solved’ China’s perennial food-shortage

problem, the truth appears to be that China's agricultural production is only about 120 million metric tons of rice and grain a year, as against 140 million before World War II.<sup>32</sup>

In positioning the Communist government of China as Red China, author Neville and *LIFE* establish a dichotomy of Self/Other, where the Self is that of Western capitalism and the Other is that of Communism. This is in contrast to Duncan's earlier story that contrasted the Self of Western capitalism against the Other of the inferior Asian governments trying to run their own operations. Kelly Ann Long argues that *LIFE* used the construction of the Other as a way to make Asia more comprehensible to Americans: "Only by... objectifying the Chinese, could *Life* bring the Chinese within the American view and make them understood."<sup>33</sup> But such binarisms dissolve the variety of reasons some countries did not choose an American approach to national growth, and obscure the problems occurring when American foreign policy promotes the toughest stances towards anti-communism. In the case of South Korea, as in other countries around the world, the United States would accept a military dictatorship in South Korea because it would pursue capitalism and fight communism—despite its anti-democratic status.

One problem with this issue is its treatment of "Asia" as a generalisation, a concern which *LIFE* briefly raises in "Why We Fight and Hope." In fact, it is difficult to write about this special issue of the magazine without accepting this generalisation; similarly, accurately describing *LIFE*'s reporting and construction of the triad of influence inherently limits discussion of variability. An example is a previously unmentioned story by Yale Professor F. S. C. Northrop, which has the broad scope of explaining Asia's religions (Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism) in contrast to the Christian West.<sup>34</sup> It was difficult for this author to use *LIFE*'s language without reproducing the magazine's treatment of Asia, which the author sees as over-generalising. However, the author decided it was important to reflect this generalised tone in order to reproduce, at times, the essence of the content. From the Political Economy and the

Critical/Cultural perspectives, the story on Japan, “The Example of Japan,” becomes important for its break from generalisations and its attempt to identify unique characteristics.

The generalisations by *LIFE* become less noticeable the more the staff were able to connect the subject with Western aspects they thought the reader would understand. For example, *LIFE* puts Japan on a relative pedestal—relative to the other Asian countries—because it is the most similar to the United States. Japan’s economy is a friendly economy, whereas non-capitalist economies are dangerous to capitalism if they succeed. Having affluence in Japan is less of an embarrassment than in other less prosperous Asian countries. Also, Japan’s culture is more adaptable, or purchasable, than that of Iran or Afghanistan. While Japan’s economic power was a fraction of the industrialised West’s economy at the beginning of the 1950s, the decade was the start of its boom era, and 1951 is often used as a marker for the growth of its economy and economic relationship with the United States. Thus, it is not surprising that *LIFE* would position Japan at this time as the model for the other Asian countries. It might have also served to reduce the strain between Japanese-Americans and White Americans because of the internment camps that held many Japanese-Americans during World War II. That Japanese-Americans were able to become naturalised citizens the next year, 1952, is an indicator of how views of Japan were changing.

It is not surprising that *LIFE* used the face of a Japanese model for news-stand appeal. She became the “commodity” for American consumption of this issue. While the bulk of the political economy of this issue reinforces American beliefs, or at least the projection of Luce’s beliefs on Americans, the cover image represents the pretty package in which *LIFE* wrapped its view of the global political economy. *LIFE* identifies and portrays the beauty that accompanies the ideal—the model is not the product of old Japan but new, Americanised Japan. By

introducing her on the cover, it could be argued, *LIFE* demonstrates the inferiority of the many other Asian countries not following a similar path: for capitalism, it implies, brings about beauty. Japan's success led to a special issue devoted wholly to it on September 11, 1964. Its cover image of a geisha, bowling, is another example of the staging of a relationship between beauty and Americanism.

Responses to the 1951 issue on Asia were overwhelmingly supportive, if published letters to the editor can be considered representative of the public's view. The president of Fairleigh Dickinson College reported that students were recommended to buy it and keep it for reference. A member of the House of Representatives called it "one of the most outstanding ever published by *LIFE*." Criticism was rare. There was an objection that *LIFE* had called Burma a member of the British Commonwealth, while an Afghan government representative argued the magazine made it seem that countries such as his did not come into existence until they made contact with the United States. The most poignant comment—one that relates to the Self/Other dimension—came from a soldier who was stationed in Asia for three years and brought back his "Oriental bride," a marriage permitted by the military but actually illegal in some American states at the time:

Since returning I have been as appalled by the general ignorance and misinformation about Asia and her peoples as I was appalled while in Asia by the lack of interest of the Americans stationed there in understanding the Asians.<sup>35</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The evaporating goodwill discussed earlier in reference to the story, "What Asians Think of U.S. Policy," is eerily reminiscent of the goodwill the United States lost after President George W. Bush invaded Iraq against the wishes of the international community. It is difficult to imagine

how history would have unfolded had the leaders of the United States read more carefully the quiet warnings in *LIFE*. This issue offered cultural and political information that was sometimes insightful and at other times so pro-American that any sense of objectivity becomes hard to detect. Given Luce's position on China, the tone of this issue reverberates with his influence. *LIFE* is at once respectful of the culture and disrespectful of the ability of Asians to manage their own affairs. *LIFE*'s editors were performing a delicate balancing act. Previously unmentioned stories on Chinese scrolls and Asian actresses buttress the crucial political pieces, for readers wanting to read serious analysis but not eager for the doom and gloom of boiling geopolitics.<sup>36</sup>

Tragic events in the twenty-first century have made Americans more aware of the rest of the world. While *LIFE*'s special issue made Americans more aware of the world, it is evident that in the long run such generalisations do not suffice to enlighten or educate Americans in the complexities and variations of Asia. In some cases, generalisations make it easier for some Americans to discriminate against any Asian because they do not see the uniqueness of each culture, country and individual.<sup>37</sup> *LIFE* might have made Japan more acceptable to Americans because the magazine was able to communicate a connection that it could not with other countries. Greater success would have been achieved if *LIFE* had found cultural connections with the South Korea that American troops were beginning to know, and would later seek out at home, notably for its food. While seemingly trivial, a discussion of Korean food popular with soldiers might have helped to reduce the Otherness.

This article has been an experiment in using different layers of analysis. Political Economy drove much of it, because of the stories published in the special issue. The relative strength of the political and economic issues of the stories has at times eclipsed discussion of the rhetorical significance of the imagery and advertisements, for the early stories, written with the

strongest voices, dealt with the political, economic and military relations between Asian countries and the United States, issues which have been highlighted here. While the subject matter lent itself to Political Economy, this analytical approach also offered a more intensive examination of how the relations were portrayed by *LIFE*. Developmental history is more concerned with the continuity of coverage than the attempts of the press to Americanise global behaviour and values. This suggests not every subject is balanced across all three layers. Different topics will fit better or interact with some layers more than others. The Political Economy perspective might not have been overt because it followed *LIFE* and Luce's pattern, but it becomes visible when paired with the Developmental perspective. The Political Economy was an enlarged, in spatial terms, summation of the magazine's Developmental history.

The Developmental layer provides context for understanding how *LIFE* followed Luce's concept of spreading American democracy and capitalism to dissimilar nations. Given the rather tight timeframe the issue was dealing with, this might have resulted in less significance for the Developmental analysis as a separate, isolated entity. The Developmental aspects of how *LIFE* represents the world were also related in some ways to the Critical/Cultural aspects of reading the images. There was little newness in the visual rhetoric and thus, the images followed in the Developmental tradition of *LIFE*: exotic places and pretty girls. The images do serve as a reminder that despite the many famous photographs appearing in *LIFE*, there were many that were mundane. More time could have been spent on the visual rhetoric of the photographs, but this does not mean it would have been a productive endeavour. In many cases, a description of the basic content was enough to demonstrate the stereotypical imagery reproduced (e.g., men on camels and elephants). *LIFE* is a cultural reflection—not of America itself—but of Luce's personal view of the United States. *LIFE* and Luce took the perspective that Americans needed

to know what they published because Korea was representative of the region's instability. The fluff was not what Americans needed to know—it was the enticement to get Americans to read the more serious pieces.

Future research might continue this experiment with different subjects and a more traditional narrative report. A more Developmental-oriented study would compare the coverage of Asia in this issue to other issues of *LIFE*. It would also allow for a more traditional narrative structure to be implemented. A more effective Critical/Cultural study might also borrow from different issues, as researcher Kozol has done. This is not a suggestion that the layered technique does not work, but simply that secondary and tertiary layers help to fill in gaps that using a primary layer alone would naturally cause, because of its inherent positive and negative limitations.

## Notes

1. *Time* called it “the original museum blockbuster, but also the show that the more dry-eyed photographers loved to hate” (“The Man of Many Parts,” *TIME*, 4 September 2000, 77). *Christian Science Monitor* wrote that as a genre it “continuously rises and falls in popularity” (Alfredo Sosa, “The Search for Relations in the Family of Humanity,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 13 December 2001, 13). *New Statesman* reported: “Though not conceived as a programme of propaganda, the exhibition none the less functioned as an advertisement for American values and freedoms as it moved across Europe.... [I]ts message was surrounded by cold-war rhetorics that blurred the boundaries of art, information and propaganda” (Liam Kennedy, “Stealing Beauty,” *New Statesman*, 6 May 2002, 36).
2. Wendy Kozol, “*Life*’s America: Family and Nation in Postwar Photojournalism (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), ix.
3. Discussion of the material in this issue is in the present tense while the reflected analysis of the magazine’s attitude and behaviour is in the past tense.
4. It should be noted that the magazine is named *LIFE* and not *Life*. *LIFE* is used here except when quoting from a source that uses *Life*. Time Inc. has confirmed this is the correct usage. All references to the special issue under focus will give the page but not the date.
5. James D. Startt and Wm. David Sloan, *Historical Methods in Mass Communication* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum, 1989), 19-39.
6. *Ibid.*, 25.
7. Frederic Hudson, *Journalism in the United States, from 1690 to 1872* (New York: Harper and Row, 1873); James Melvin Lee, *History of American Journalism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1917); Willard G. Bleyer, *Main Currents in the History of American Journalism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927); Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism; A History of Newspapers in the United States Through 150 Years: 1690*

to 1940 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941).

8. Startt and Sloan, 25-26.

9. Anthony Y. H. Fung, "Politics of Media Economics and Economy of Media Politics: An Overview" (*Journal of Communication Inquiry* 20, 1996), 99-113.

10. When Political Economy is capitalised it refers to the historical approach; when it is not capitalised it refers to political economy theory in general. Critical/Cultural is capitalised as a reference for a distinct approach and to differentiate it from cultural studies and history in general.

11. Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), xii.

12. Daniel Marshall Haygood, "Henry Luce Head Cheerleader for American Hegemony? 'Time' Magazine's Coverage of Indonesia 1965-1966," paper presented at annual convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Toronto, Canada, August 2004.

<http://list.msu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0411c&L=aejmc&F=&S=&P=5691> (accessed 22 February 2005).

13. Information found via Wikipedia and answers.com.

14. "LIFE'S COVER," *LIFE*, 11.

15. Stories omitted are "Who Cares About Asia," 12-13; "New Era for Afghans," 70-71; "Ambassador Extraordinary," 72-75; James Michener, "Chinese Success Story," 76-81; "Oil from a Sandy Sheikdom," 82-83; "Abominable Himalayan," 88; "What's In A Picture," 90; "Life Visits the Beach of Passionate Love," 84-87.

16. "Three Views of Asia," *LIFE*, 5-9.

17. David D. Duncan, "Decline of the Westerner," *LIFE*, 14-15.

18. Duncan's quotation comes from the text on page 14. *LIFE*'s position on a "badly" run Asia appears in the subhead on page 15 and in Duncan's text at the end of the story.

19. Duncan, 14.

20. Duncan, 15.

21. Robert Neville, "Rise of the Red Star," *LIFE*, 16-23. "What Asians Think of U.S. Policy," *LIFE*, 24-25. "Why We Fight and Hope," *LIFE*, 25-26.

22. Neville, "Rise of the Red Star," 16.

23. *Ibid.*, 18.

24. *Ibid.*, 19.

25. "What Asians Think of U.S. Policy," 24.

26. "Why We Fight and Hope," 25.

27. "Medical missionary," *LIFE*, 56-57.

28. "The Example of Japan," *LIFE*, 58-69.

29. *Ibid.*, 60-1.

30. "Film Queens of Asia," *LIFE*, 50-51. The idea that *LIFE* represented Asians as the "Other" is not new in itself. See Kelly Ann Long, "Friend or Foe: *Life*'s Wartime Images of the Chinese" in Erika Doss, ed., *LIFE* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001).

31. "Akha Tribe, Burma: Sterilization and Blood Theft By Missionaries," [www.eco-action.org/mission/akha1.html](http://www.eco-action.org/mission/akha1.html). (accessed 8 February 2005).

32. Neville, "Rise of the Red Star," 18-19.

33. Long, 56.

34. F. S. C. Northrop, "The Mind of Asia," *LIFE*, 38-42.

35. See letters by Peter Sammartino, Wayne N. Aspinall, Anne Burnett, Abdussattar Shalizi, and Leonard C. Moffitt.

36. "Film Queens of Asia," 50-51.

37. *LIFE*'s consistent and repetitive use of generalised racial and stereotypical terms from this era may have contributed to some people adopting these ideas as the norm.