

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE PEACE CORPS IN BIG CITIES OF CHINA: AN EXCEPTION TO AMERICAN DIPLOMATIC PHILOSOPHY?

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Abstract: The Peace Corps program was once considered an unconventional approach to American diplomacy centered on pragmatic philosophy. The initiative of Peace Corps in China was perceived as an extraordinary endeavor, yet it has been effectively operating in China for nearly thirty years. The volunteers involved in the program have been instrumental in promoting people-to-people exchanges between the United States and China, drawing from their experiences in cultural immersion. The creation of the "U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers" path was intended to improve bilateral relations between the two nations. Despite opposition from the U.S. Congress, the Peace Corps has not surpassed the foreign policy of the United States. However, when the Peace Corps program goes against the policy between the United States and China, it has to end its development in China. This contradicts the claimed political neutrality of the Peace Corps. Throughout the "U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers" program, most volunteers have worked in universities in large cities. Consequently, the cultural adaptation environment for Peace Corps volunteers in China is unique. They are presented with more challenging cultural differences, with relatively lower acculturation stress in their material life. The Peace Corps enables most volunteers to bolster cultural exchanges between China and the United States through active cultural learning support. The development of the Peace Corps project in China reveals no fundamental distinction between its activities in China and other countries. Hence, the "U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers" program of the Peace Corps is not an exception to the pragmatic diplomatic philosophy of the United States.

Keywords: Peace Corps. "U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers". Acculturation. Pragmatism.

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Resumo: Historicamente, as missões do Corpo da Paz na China foram vistas como uma exceção à regra da diplomacia americana, que se baseia em uma mentalidade pragmática. De maneira um tanto discreta, o Corpo da Paz vem operando na China, há quase 30 anos. Os voluntários têm feito contribuições significativas para o intercâmbio de pessoas entre a China e os Estados Unidos, através de suas próprias experiências de aculturação. Desde o desenvolvimento do caminho dos "Voluntários da Amizade EUA-China", na China, embora o Corpo da Paz tenha tentado desafiar a resistência do Congresso dos EUA, ele não conseguiu superar a política externa dos EUA. Os "Voluntários da Amizade EUA-China" foram estabelecidos devido à melhoria das relações bilaterais entre a China e os Estados Unidos e se desenvolveram porque poderiam ajudar os Estados Unidos a promover ainda mais as relações bilaterais. Entretanto, embora o Corpo da Paz afirme ser politicamente independente, ele deve interromper seu desenvolvimento, na China, quando o desenvolvimento do projeto entrar em conflito com a política americana em relação à China. Embora a maioria dos voluntários trabalhe em faculdades, nas grandes cidades, o ambiente de ajuste cultural para os voluntários do Corpo da Paz na China é relativamente único, na história do programa. Eles encontram diferenças culturais mais difíceis, enquanto experimentam substancialmente menos estresse aculturativo, na vida diária. A maioria dos voluntários do Corpo da Paz é capaz de encorajar intercâmbios culturais entre a China e os Estados Unidos, devido ao seu apoio ativo ao aprendizado cultural. Descobriu-se que não há diferenças significativas entre as atividades do Corpo da Paz na China e as de outros países, depois de se examinar o histórico de desenvolvimento do projeto, na China. O Corpo da Paz não é uma exceção à abordagem americana da diplomacia, a qual é pragmática.

Palavras-chave: Corpo da Paz. "Voluntários da Amizade EUA-China". Aculturação. Pragmatismo.

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Abstract: The Peace Corps program was once considered an unconventional approach to American diplomacy centered on pragmatic philosophy. The initiative of Peace Corps in China was perceived as an extraordinary endeavor, yet it has been effectively operating in China for nearly thirty years. The volunteers involved in the program have been instrumental in promoting people-to-people exchanges between the United States and China, drawing from their experiences in cultural immersion. The creation of the “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers” path was intended to improve bilateral relations between the two nations. Despite opposition from the U.S. Congress, the Peace Corps has not surpassed the foreign policy of the United States. However, when the Peace Corps program goes against the policy between the United States and China, it has to end its development in China. This contradicts the claimed political neutrality of the Peace Corps. Throughout the “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers” program, most volunteers have worked in universities in large cities. Consequently, the cultural adaptation environment for Peace Corps volunteers in China is unique. They are presented with more challenging cultural differences, with relatively lower acculturation stress in their material life. The Peace Corps enables most volunteers to bolster cultural exchanges between China and the United States through active cultural learning support. The development of the Peace Corps project in China reveals no fundamental distinction between its activities in China and other countries. Hence, the “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers” program of the Peace Corps is not an exception to the pragmatic diplomatic philosophy of the United States.

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INTRODUCTION

Pragmatism in diplomacy refers to an approach that focuses on practical considerations, real-world outcomes and flexible decision-making based on current circumstances (Ralston, 2011). It involves a willingness to adapt strategies and policies to achieve specific objectives, often prioritizing national interests and concrete results over ideological or abstract principles. In the context of U.S. diplomacy, pragmatism can be traced back to the early 20th century and has been a recurring theme in American foreign policy. It is rooted in the belief that diplomacy should be driven by a realistic assessment of the international landscape and a willingness to engage with other nations in pursuit of tangible goals. As an independent

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agency of the U.S. federal government, the Peace Corps was established during the Kennedy administration as a part of American Cold War policies (Julius, 1997, p. 113). Hence its philosophy is rooted in pragmatism, which is widely regarded as a fundamental principle underpinning American diplomacy (Belohlavek, 1991, p. 599).

The three objectives set by the Peace Corps can be divided into two important focal points. One is to provide talent assistance to the host country to promote its development, while the other two are aimed at fostering mutual understanding between the United States and the host countries. Over the years, it has also maintained that it is politically neutral in its pursuits. Correspondingly, the Peace Corps has enjoyed a long-standing reputation for promoting cultural exchanges between the United States and developing countries. Therefore, from this perspective, the Peace Corps appears to have an idealistic hue. Realism or idealism? Parallel consistency with the overall foreign policies of the United States or standing alone? This is an interesting topic worth exploring in studying the Peace Corps.

In early 2020, news about the withdrawal of Peace Corps from China abruptly brought an end to the projects of the program in the country before the program could gain broader recognition. Due to the bilateral relations between China and the United States, the development process of the Peace Corps in China was not initiated until the 1980s. It was not until 1993 that the Peace Corps officially launched its projects in China under the title of “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers”. This subdued name concealed the activities of the program in China, leading to the general population’s limited knowledge about it. Additionally, academia, both domestically and abroad, has contributed scant attention to research on the Peace Corps projects in China.

This study uses the development trajectory of bilateral relations between China and the United States as a key point of inquiry, investigating the history of activities of the Peace Corps in China. By examining this relationship, we aim to shed light on the interconnections between the Peace Corps and the development path project of China and the bilateral relations between the two nations. Furthermore, we delve into the acculturative stress that Peace Corps volunteers encounter in China, the type of cultural learning support that Peace Corps provides to its volunteers and the acculturative effect that volunteers have on the large cities in China. By doing so, we arrive at a comprehensive understanding about the activities and initiatives of the Peace Corps in China and provide a case study to support whether the Peace Corps is part of the pragmatic diplomacy of the United States.

1 “U.S.-CHINA FRIENDSHIP VOLUNTEERS”: PARALLEL TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHINA-U.S. BILATERAL RELATIONS

Peace Corps had long considered entering China to provide mid-level human resources assistance. However, the decision was delayed due to the complexities surrounding China-U.S. relations. In the 1960s, when the Peace Corps was established, China was the largest developing country globally, with a population exceeding one-fifth of the world population. At that time, the development level of China was relatively low, with a significant portion of its population living below the poverty line. Following the decline of China-Soviet relations, the Soviet Union withdrew its experts from China and discontinued its scientific and technological cooperation projects with it, severely impacting the development of China. Given the circumstances, China was keen on receiving human resources assistance from the Peace Corps, which prided itself on providing such aid to developing countries. As such, China, the largest developing country in the world then, naturally, became a potential host country for the Peace Corps.

Shriver, the first director of the Peace Corps, had explored the possibility of its establishment in China during the early days of the organization (Rice, 1985, p. 261). However, despite the claim of political neutrality of the Peace Corps and its refusal to be utilized as a strategic tool of the United States, its operations are inevitably affected by American foreign relations. The influence of China-U.S. relations prevented the Peace Corps from entering China then. The U.S. government policy of political isolation, economic blockade and military encirclement towards China, during its founding years, created an atmosphere of hostility between the two nations (Zhao; Li; Guo, 1996, p. 15). The confrontation between the Chinese and American armies, during the Korean War, further isolated the two nations for nearly two decades (Cheng; Zhao, 1993, p. 94). Within this context of the Cold War and China-U.S. relations, the early Peace Corps was hostile to communism and predisposed to prejudice against China. Meanwhile, the understanding of China about the Peace Corps was incomplete and biased, leading to a widespread belief that the organization was a spying agency operating in China.

The gradual entry of the Peace Corps into China occurred due to the improvement of China-U.S. relations. The turning point came in 1972 when President Nixon visited China, breaking the mutual isolation between the two nations. In 1979, diplomatic relations were established through a joint communique between the People's Republic of China and the United States. Despite this development, it took several years before the Peace Corps was allowed to enter China. In 1981, the Peace Corps and UN Volunteers collaborated to send volunteers to China, focusing on English teaching. This program continued until 1989 when the largest contingent of Peace Corps volunteers was sent to China through this partnership. In 1984, during the U.S. election, American diplomats invited Chinese officials to a party

at the Great Wall Hotel to watch the results live. During this event, one of the Chinese officials expressed interest in a Peace Corps project in China. This was the first time China had expressed interest in the Peace Corps. The U.S. side was excited by this request, but it still took four years of investigation and communication between the two nations before they reached an agreement in principle in 1988. On June 6th, 1988, the head of the Peace Corps, Loret Ruppe, announced that a working group would be sent to China to work out the details of the Peace Corps project in China. However, both China and the United States emphasized that extensive negotiations were needed before any volunteers could be sent to China. Finally, in 1991, the Peace Corps officially began operating in China with 29 volunteers working in various capacities. Over the years, the program continued to expand, with volunteers working in different provinces and cities across China.

At the outset of the negotiations between China and the United States, regarding the entry of the Peace Corps into China, the only confirmed project details were that volunteers would serve as English teachers to Chinese teachers and students. The political climate in China, during the 1950s, meant that learning Russian, as opposed to English, was prioritized. To this end, the scale of English education in China was significantly reduced, with only one institution, Central China Normal University, having an English department as of 1953. Furthermore, just nine universities in China had English teaching facilities (Dai; Hu, 2009, p. 773), making English education in the country exceptionally scarce then. It was not until the breakdown of Sino-Soviet relations, in the early 1960s, that China began to recognize the importance of English education. In 1964, the outline of a seven-year plan for foreign language education was issued, elevating the status of English as the primary foreign language in China. However, the Cultural Revolution adversely affected English education, with English textbooks filled with political slogans and text materials becoming disjointed, leading to further disruption in the delivery of English education.

Following the Third Plenary Session of the 11th CPC Central Committee, China adopted a fundamental national policy of reform and opening up. As a result, the CPC shifted its focus from class struggle to economic construction, and English education was re-evaluated for its role as a communication tool serving commercial development. Consequently, the dominant position of English education, as the primary foreign language in China, was further reinforced (Cao, 2019, p. 9). However, despite rapid growth of English education in China during the 1980s, the development of related talents was still inadequate, particularly those who could communicate proficiently in English. During the negotiations surrounding the Peace Corps project in China, it became clear that education would be the most significant project category as it was suitable for developing English education in China.

Furthermore, U.S. observers believed that China deemed English education critical to its modernization program, and they saw the Peace Corps project as a tool to consolidate

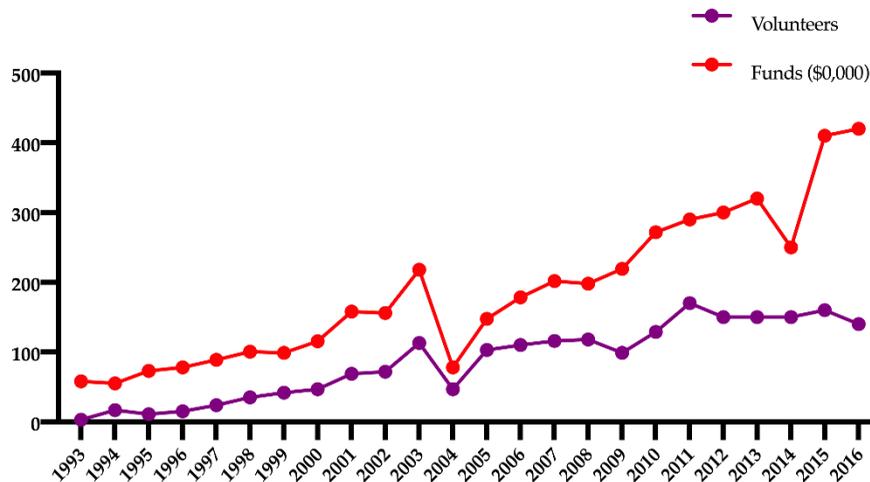
national efforts in this area (Cheng; Fu, 1988, p. 6). In addition to the challenges in developing environmental education projects, another issue that emerged during Peace Corps' entry into China was using the name "Peace Corps". U.S. officials believed that the Chinese would be willing to accept American assistance in learning English but not American guidance on farming. At the same time, the Peace Corps attempted to develop environmental education projects in China from 2002 to 2006. Still, these efforts failed due to a "[...] misunderstanding of skills and professional knowledge of environmental education volunteers" between the Peace Corps and China (Peace Corps, 1991). One of the most significant sticking points that hindered negotiations between the United States and China was using the name "Peace Corps" in China. Owing to negative publicity surrounding the organization in China, many Chinese officials believed that the Peace Corps was a secret arm of the U.S. government and that its volunteers were CIA agents. As a result, it was feared that using the name "Peace Corps" would create public relations hurdles for volunteers working in China (Peace Corps, 2012). Chinese representatives opposed using the name "Peace Corps" in China as it was thought to make Peace Corps projects in China less acceptable, and the two sides ultimately agreed to use the official name "U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers" instead for the project in China.

The areas where Peace Corps would work in China were negotiated in detail. At the time, approximately 1,000 Americans were teaching English in China, primarily in coastal areas or big cities (Hirschhoff, 1988). Peace Corps intended to provide assistance in weak areas of China. Chinese officials agreed to this, stipulating that volunteers would not be stationed in big cities but rather in small towns or remote areas lacking teachers and facilities (Hirschhoff, 1988). As a non-political organization, Peace Corps prohibited volunteers from participating in the political affairs of the host country, a condition that China readily agreed to. Due to the concerns of China about controversial issues in Xinjiang and Tibet, these regions were deemed unsuitable for accepting Peace Corps volunteers. Thus, the two sides chose Sichuan Province as the first region to receive Peace Corps volunteers, and the Peace Corps office in China was established at the campus of Sichuan University, in Chengdu. In 1989, Peace Corps reintroduced the domestic training model in the United States to train the first group of volunteers for China. However, with the deterioration of China-U.S. relations in that same year, the Peace Corps was obliged to defer sending volunteers to China, and those who had been trained for the programs of China were sent to other countries. In 1993, China-U.S. relations improved vastly. In June of that year, the "U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers" project in China was launched, and Peace Corps dispatched its first batch of 18 volunteers to Sichuan, in China.

As shown in Figure 1, the "U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers" program in China experienced generally smooth and sustainable development from 1993 to 2016. The funds and volunteer numbers for the Peace Corps project in China gradually increased during

this period. Following five years of successful pilot operations, China and the United States signed an agreement on June 29th, 1998, which stipulated implementing the United States volunteer program in China. According to the agreement, the Peace Corps project in China is a cooperative effort between the Chinese and the American governments, with the Chinese government actively managing the “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers” program. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs coordinates the project, while the Ministry of Education oversees its centralized management.

Figure 1 - Volunteer numbers of Peace Corps and budgets of funds for the project in China (1993-2016)



Source: The numbers are from Peace Corps Congressional Budget Justification (FY1994-FY2017); volunteer numbers for FY 2002-FY2008 are official estimates where actual numbers are not provided.

President Clinton emphasized that the agreement was an essential step towards fostering friendly ties between the Chinese and American peoples, while Mark Gearan, head of the Peace Corps, believed that Peace Corps volunteers in China played a crucial role in advancing the people-to-people relationship of vital importance at the start of the new century. (Peace Corps, 1998). He also stated that the entry of the agreement into force demonstrated that the people-to-people relationship, fostered by the Peace Corps, received the same level of attention as the traditional government-to-government relationship. After signing the agreement, Peace Corps extended its service areas to Guizhou and Gansu provinces in 1999 and 2000, respectively, and then to Chongqing after it became a municipality directly under the Chinese central government in 1997. Then, the Peace Corps program in China was active in Sichuan, Guizhou, Gansu and Chongqing. In April 2003, Peace Corps withdrew its volunteers from China due to the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Nonetheless, Peace Corps resumed the program in July 2004 and rapidly deployed volunteers

to China (Peace Corps, 2004). In its 2012 Project Evaluation Report on China, Peace Corps lauded the excellent contribution of the “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers”, especially their Chinese employees. From 1993 to 2018, Peace Corps sent 24 groups of volunteers to China, and over 1,391 volunteers served for two years in more than 100 colleges, universities, vocational and technical colleges in China.

Due to the all-around development of economy and society in China and the intensifying global competition with the United States, the Peace Corps projects in China encountered growing skepticism and eventually ended.

The rapid development of economy and society in China has lessened the urgency for China to accept volunteer assistance from the Peace Corps. The economy of China has grown tremendously since initiating reforms and the opening-up policy. In 2010, the GDP of China surpassed the one of Japan, cementing the status of China as the world’s second-largest economy after the United States. Furthermore, China has become one of the leading countries providing foreign aid worldwide (Ren; Liu, 2017). According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics of China, the per capita GDP of Sichuan, where the first batch of Peace Corps volunteers worked in 1993, was only 1,854 yuan, but by 2018, it had risen to 48,883.2 yuan. The remote small cities, where Peace Corps volunteers had served in the 1990s, have become large cities with comprehensive transportation systems, and the gap in development between western and coastal China has narrowed significantly. The shortage of foreign English teachers has also been reduced. With the improved treatment of foreign English teachers in China, improved working and living environments, and increased employment opportunities, more native English-speaking foreigners have chosen to teach English in China. In 2017, 400,000 foreigners taught English in China, and most colleges, universities, primary and secondary schools, and off-campus training institutions have already employed foreign teachers. With various remote communication channels now available, between Chinese students and foreign English teachers online, direct communication has become much more convenient.

Along with the rapid development of China and the continual rise of its comprehensive national strength, the competition between China and the United States has become increasingly apparent. Following the formal establishment of diplomatic relations in 1979, China and the United States issued “China-U.S. joint statements” in 1997, 2009 and 2011, respectively. These statements emphasized the need for both countries to strengthen cooperation and establish a constructive strategic partnership for the 21st century. The statements also underscored the importance of developing positive, cooperative and comprehensive China-U.S. relations in the 21st century. Additionally, both nations committed to taking practical actions to establish a partnership to address common challenges and to work towards building a coalition of mutual respect, mutual benefit and

win-win outcomes. As the comprehensive national strength of China continues to rise, the competitive relationship between China and the United States has become increasingly apparent. The global distribution pattern of interests between China and the United States has gradually changed. The ability of China to influence international affairs has increased, while the United States has relatively declined. China has emerged as a significant competitor of the United States in numerous fields, including the economy, science, technology, military affairs, diplomacy and education. To maintain its dominant position in the exchanges of China for an extended period, the United States has continued to increase competition with China in the military, diplomatic, economic and ideological arenas. Sometimes, even resort to unilateral sanctions policies (Liu, 2016, p. 79). Since entering the 21st century, trading disputes between China and the United States have been on the rise. Notably in 2018, despite the objections of China, the President of the United States insisted on launching a trade war against China, bringing trade disputes between the two countries to a climax. There are now increasing anti-China voices in the U.S. government and Congress. Mike Pompeo, the then Secretary of State of the United States and former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, has even signaled to China that “[...] you are our enemy” (Lovelace, 2018).

In the past few years, the primary pressure, faced by the “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers” program, has come from the U.S. Congress. In a letter to President Obama in 2011, U.S. Republican Representative Mike Coffman argued that “China has recently become the world’s second-largest economy” and that the United States had no reasonable reason to invest taxpayers’ money in the economic development of China (Milatovic-Ovadia, 2019, p. 29). Additionally, Coffman considered the Peace Corps project in China to be “[...] borrowing money from China to fund China,” which was insulting to “[...] every taxpayer in the United States and many manufacturing workers who have lost their jobs because of China” (Coffman, 2011). Coffman subsequently proposed an amendment to “[...] cancel funding for the project” if the President did not terminate the Peace Corps program in China (Somanader, 2012). Despite this pressure, President Obama was a loyal supporter of the Peace Corps. During the 2008 presidential campaign, he pledged to double the Peace Corps size if elected President (Jacobson, 2010). Throughout his term in office, he increased the Peace Corps budget and signed several bills to protect Peace Corps volunteers, ensuring that the Peace Corps project in China was not terminated. However, the Trump administration changed this friendly attitude towards the Peace Corps. During Trump’s presidency, he recommended significant cuts to the Peace Corps budget (Peace Corps, 2019b).

During the China-U.S. trade war, initiated by the Trump administration, Republican Senator Rick Scott once again challenged the Peace Corps program. On July 11, 2019, Scott urged the Peace Corps leader, Jody Olsen, to terminate the program in China. However, Olsen directly rejected this request, citing that it was not feasible (Tapscott, 2019). Scott believed that “China is a wealthy nation” and “[...] the Peace Corps should not use dollars

to aid American opponents” (Peace Corps, 2010a). He stated that “[...] the United States should not provide millions of dollars of foreign aid to China every year, and American taxpayers should not have to send volunteers to fulfill the work of the Chinese Communist government” (Scott, 2019). Nevertheless, Scott persisted and submitted a bill, s.2320, to Congress, which requires that the “Peace Corps must terminate any projects in China before September 30, 2020”, furthermore, it states that “[...] the current independent status of the Peace Corps” does not support “[...] the management of the foreign policy objectives of the United States government” (Peace Corps, 2010b). Hence, the suggestion that the Peace Corps should be transferred to the Department of State “[...] to coordinate the work of Peace Corps with the overall foreign policy objectives of the United States government” was made (Congress, 2019).

Scott’s bill faced strong opposition from supporters of the Peace Corps. Ten former Peace Corps directors, who had previously served Democratic and Republican administrations, wrote to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee leaders, urging them to reject the bill. They stressed that, since its founding, every President of the United States has reasserted the independence of the Peace Corps, ensuring that volunteers are distinct from those who carry out the day-to-day foreign and security policies of the United States. The perception of the international community about the independence and non-political nature of the Peace Corps is critical to its continued success. If s.2320 were to end the independence of the Peace Corps, it would put “[...] both volunteers and the Peace Corps itself in serious danger” (Igoe, 2020).

Even though the Senate has not yet passed s.2320, the “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers” program has come to an end. On January 16th, 2020, Senator Marco Rubio stated that the Peace Corps had officially informed members of Congress that volunteers would be withdrawn from China starting June 2020. According to Rubio (2020), the decision of the Peace Corps to withdraw volunteers from China confirms that China is no longer a developing nation. He further claimed that the Chinese government had deceived institutions like the World Bank and the World Trade Organization by portraying itself as a developing country, thereby exploiting global institutions to its advantage.

The announcement of the decision of the Peace Corps to withdraw volunteers from China has outraged former Peace Corps volunteers who had served in China. One former volunteer stated that Peace Corps in China was not only benefiting the Chinese but benefiting the American side much more (Asiaexpertsforum, 2021). Another has created an online petition calling on the Peace Corps to reverse their decision, stating that the “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers” program provides “[...] essential human-to-human connections” between China and the United States, creating a “[...] unique space for mutual understanding and active cooperation” (Igoe, 2020). It remains unclear whether

the “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers” program will impact the independent status of the Peace Corps. The reasons behind the decision of the Peace Corps remain unknown, whether based on the program assessment of the organization, congressional pressure or other factors. However, the development of the Peace Corps in a host country is closely intertwined with American foreign relations. The bilateral relationship between the United States and the host country plays a vital role in determining the development of the Peace Corps in a host country. When the Peace Corps supports the foreign policy objectives of the United States towards the host country, it can develop and operate smoothly. Conversely, if the Peace Corps project goes against American foreign policy objectives, its development will be hampered and may even end.

2 VOLUNTEERS’ ACCULTURATIVE STRESS IN CHINA AND CULTURAL LEARNING SUPPORT OF PEACE CORPS

Acculturative stress and cultural learning are two mainstream theoretical perspectives for studying acculturation, as noted by Berry (2006). In the case of the Peace Corps volunteers’ adaptation to Chinese culture, the stress they experience primarily arises from the divergence between Eastern and Western cultures. However, the cultural learning support offered by the Peace Corps can aid these volunteers in overcoming such disparities and integrating into the local social culture.

2.1 VOLUNTEERS’ ACCULTURATIVE STRESS IN CHINA

Peace Corps volunteers serving in China may face less pressure regarding the social and economic development level of the areas they serve. However, they may encounter significant cultural differences between their home country and the local culture, increasing pressure on their cultural adaptation. Despite the challenges, volunteers in China typically enjoy good material conditions and living convenience, which can help ease their transition into the local community.

Peace Corps volunteers from China are primarily tasked with teaching English at universities in the central cities of Sichuan, Chongqing, Guizhou and Gansu provinces. As many Chinese universities are in provincial capitals, the universities collaborating with the Peace Corps are typically located in cities such as Chengdu, Lanzhou, Guiyang and Chongqing. The evaluation report of the 2012 Peace Corps project in China revealed that approximately half of all volunteers served in these four cities. In 2018, the annual report of the “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers” program indicated that 89 universities were collaborating with Peace

Corps in China, 57 of which were located in the cities of Chongqing, Chengdu, Lanzhou and Guiyang, with only 36% of universities situated in prefecture-level cities (including 14 in Sichuan Province, 7 in Gansu Province and 11 in Guizhou Province) (Peace Corps, 2019a). While the social and economic development level of these cities was weaker, compared to coastal areas when Peace Corps first entered China in the 1990s, these cities have become some of the highest developed areas in their respective regions over time. With the rapid economic development in China, the infrastructure of these cities has improved significantly, and the gap between the volunteers' living and working environment and their previous environment in the United States has gradually decreased.

Peace Corps volunteers in China have typically enjoyed better living conditions than their Chinese teacher counterparts. Housing arrangements for these volunteers are generally provided by the colleges or universities where they serve, and the apartments are usually located on campus. These apartments are comparable to those offered for other foreign teachers and typically contain living rooms, bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchens and, sometimes, a study. Moreover, apartments have access to amenities like water heaters, washing machines, air conditioners, refrigerators, televisions and induction cookers. During the 1990s, the housing conditions for Peace Corps volunteers were often better than those provided to Chinese teachers at the same school. For instance, while most Chinese teachers' families weren't equipped with air conditioning, some schools had already installed air conditioning units in the Peace Corps volunteers' apartments (Hessler, 2002, p. 61). However, with the continuous improvement of the Chinese university teachers' income level, many teachers have moved out from teachers' apartments to more high-end residential areas. As a result, the living conditions for volunteers are better than those provided by schools for Chinese teachers, but generally weaker than those purchased by Chinese teachers off-campus.

Initially, the living allowance provided to Peace Corps volunteers based in China was relatively comfortable. However, as the price level in China continued to improve, the living allowance provided to volunteers increasingly restricted their lifestyle. For instance, in 1996, Peace Corps provided a monthly living allowance of 1,000 yuan (approximately \$120) to volunteers serving in China (Hessler, 2002, p. 151). At the price level in China during that period, such living allowances were relatively abundant for volunteers. They could easily save money even if they ate every meal outside. In 1996, the per capita GDP of Sichuan Province was 3,550 yuan. By 2013, the per capita GDP of Sichuan Province had increased to 32,617 yuan, representing an almost ten-fold increase.

Although the living allowance provided to Peace Corps volunteers in China was comfortable in its early days, it has not kept up with the rising cost of living in the country. By 2013, the allowance had increased only to 1,410 yuan per month (approximately \$220 per month) (Peace Corps, 2013), representing an increase of only 410 yuan compared to

1996. The living allowance covers the volunteers' basic needs, such as food, clothing, local entertainment and travel, communication and other incidental expenses. Furthermore, each volunteer can receive \$24 per month as an additional allowance from Peace Corps. However, it is critical to note that Peace Corps stipulates that volunteers should not accept any other paid position, school bonus, valuable gift, or other payments from individuals or institutions during their term of office (Peace Corps, 2013). Additionally, any auxiliary projects, such as counseling or lectures, must be carried out free of charge. Consequently, the living allowance provided to volunteers in China has become increasingly stretched, given the rising cost of living there.

While the material conditions for Peace Corps volunteers in China may have improved over time, cultural differences between China and the United States have placed significant pressure on the volunteers. American culture represents Western culture, while Chinese culture is typical of Oriental culture. According to Furnham and Bochner's (1982, p. 161) concept of cultural distance, Chinese culture is considered a typical "distant" culture compared to American culture. Chinese culture is a high-context culture that tends to express its meaning through the external environment or values and norms internalized in people's minds. In contrast, American culture is low-context and tends to communicate most information in straightforward language (Hall, 1976; McLaren, 1998). Moreover, from the perspective of cultural value orientation, Chinese culture is typical of collectivism with a high long-term positioning index. In contrast, American culture is typical of individualism and short-term positioning culture (Hofstede, 2001). Significant differences exist between the economic, legal, cultural and educational systems of China and the United States, which may pose some challenges to volunteers. Furthermore, there are considerable language differences between China and the United States. Chinese belongs to the China-Tibetan language family with an ideographic writing system, while English belongs to the Indo-European language family. Additionally, there are considerable differences between religious beliefs and traditional customs between China and the United States. The cultural differences between China and the United States can present significant challenges for Peace Corps volunteers.

A 2009 Peace Corps survey of volunteers, serving in China, found that cultural differences and language were the most significant sources of stress. The survey utilized a Likert scale to gauge the degree of stress or emotional health problems experienced by the volunteers. Only 6% of the participants reported that cultural factors did not exert any pressure on them (stress level 1). However, 17% of the respondents felt that cultural differences exerted an extremely high level of pressure (corresponding to a stress level of 5). Moreover, 39% and 22% of the participants experienced a stress level of 3 and 4, respectively. Concerning the local language, 9% of the volunteers reported that it did not cause any pressure (stress level 1). In contrast, 9% of the respondents found the local language extremely stressful (stress

level 5), while 31% and 27% experienced a stress level of 3 and 4, respectively (Peace Corps, 2009).

Regarding the specific objectives of the “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers” program, cultural exchange assumes an essential role. In line with the three official objectives of the Peace Corps, the three main goals of this program are: satisfying the demand of China for trained English teachers, aiding Chinese educators and pupils in gaining a greater understanding of American culture, and facilitating American volunteers’ acquisition and sharing of Chinese language and culture (Peace Corps, 2020). For English-fluent volunteers, teaching English to college students usually poses no primary challenge. As such, volunteers can readily achieve the first objective by performing their duties as foreign teachers and fulfilling their teaching responsibilities. However, the distinctive and essential value of the initiative of the “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers” program lies in its second and third objectives, which involve advancing cultural exchanges between China and the United States. To promote such exchanges more effectively, the “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers” program requires volunteers to excel in English classroom instruction and undertake a range of secondary projects that mainly aim to foster communication. These projects include organizing English clubs, drama and speech clubs, sports clubs and various cultural activities with Chinese teachers and students (Peace Corps, 2019a). According to one report by the Peace Corps, in 2009, volunteers in China allocated an average of 24.8 hours per week to primary projects and seven hours per week to secondary projects (Peace Corps, 2009).

2.2 CULTURAL LEARNING SUPPORT FOR VOLUNTEERS IN THE “U.S.-CHINA FRIENDSHIP VOLUNTEERS” PROGRAM

The recent recruitment criteria for the “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers” program suggest that the Peace Corps has no specific requirements for volunteers participating in the program of China. Similar to most other Peace Corps projects, volunteers are required to have a bachelor’s degree or higher, and there are no limitations on their professional background or foreign language proficiency. According to the *Peace Corps Volunteer 2009 Annual Volunteer Survey: China*, most surveyed volunteers (60%) were young individuals aged between 20 and 29 years. Among the volunteers, 55% were females, and 45% were males (Peace Corps, 2009). The 2012 Final Report on the Program Evaluation of Peace Corps/China found that, in 2011, 49% of the volunteers were aged 25 years or younger, while 30% were between 26 and 29 years old. Additionally, 58% and 42% of the volunteers were females and males, respectively (Peace Corps, 2012). In general, the “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers” program mainly attracts young college graduates, consistent with Peace Corps volunteers’ characteristics globally.

The volunteer training of the “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers” program is completed in China. Like other host countries, volunteer training comprises pre-service and in-service training. The pre-service training time is ten weeks, including eight weeks of centralized training and two weeks of teaching practice. In-service training is carried out in the winter vacation of the first and second years, respectively. Besides, pre-service training is integral to the entire volunteer training program and primarily involves language and culture training, skill building, and health and safety training. Among these, language and culture, as well as English teaching training, form the core and account for 140 and 80 class hours, respectively (Peace Corps, 2018).

The language and cultural training provided in the “US-China Friendship Volunteers” program highlights utilizing local resources and protecting the environment. Under the Chengdu office in China, the recruitment process primarily involves the language and cultural training instructors’ appointment. Potential Chinese teachers must have a Putonghua level of level II or above, excellent oral and written English proficiency, and a bachelor’s degree in teaching Chinese as a foreign language or linguistics, Chinese or English, or any relevant majors. The program provides teachers, who have passed the interview with pre-job, training to ensure they are adequately prepared to undertake volunteer language and cultural training. During the language and cultural learning stage, volunteers are grouped into different learning groups, comprising about five individuals each one, with each teacher being responsible for the language and cultural courses of a specific group. The pre-service training stage mainly focuses on oral English, with volunteers initially learning Chinese Pinyin before mastering essential oral expressions to suit distinct situations (Peace Corps, 2017).

Language and culture training incorporates community-based learning methods within the “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers” program. The program arranges language and culture training classrooms in various colleges and universities in Chengdu. Teachers employ communicative teaching methodologies during classroom instruction, supplementing with appropriate extracurricular activities. For pre-service training purposes, Peace Corps allocates local residential families for the volunteers’ accommodation, where they will reside with their host families throughout the duration of the training. Language and culture training content may occasionally include tasks requiring volunteers and host families’ collaboration (Peace Corps, 2013). Under the tutelage of Peace Corps guidance, host families offer aid to volunteers in practicing and augmenting their language skills and equipping them with essential social skills for accommodating the lifestyle of the local community .

In addition to pre-service training, the “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers” program, under the Peace Corps, provides complementary learning opportunities to aid the volunteers’ development in language and cultural learning. After meeting the language requirements of the program through pre-service training, most volunteers report such proficiencies as simple

oral dialogue in the face of basic communication scenarios. Despite this, the “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers” program encourages volunteers to participate in language learning classes and hire Chinese tutors to enable more profound communication with the locals. The program will reimburse related learning expenses (Hessler, 2002, p. 60; Peace Corps, 2018). Volunteers can continue to learn Chinese written language and develop more advanced spoken Chinese language skills through this method for up to two years of service. During winter vacation, Peace Corps also provides in-service training for volunteers to consolidate their language and cultural knowledge and exchange and share experiences (Peace Corps, 2013, 2018).

Overall, the language training within the “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers” program has proved effective. A 2009 survey report, released by Peace Corps, indicated that 54% of the volunteers in the program successfully interacted with the local people at least once every week, with 21% having daily interactions with the locals. 45% and 20% of the volunteers involved in the survey expressed being able to communicate “enough” and “well” in the local language, respectively. In comparison, 6% of the volunteers revealed being able to speak “very well” with the locals (Peace Corps, 2009). In some cases, volunteers learned the spoken Putonghua dialect and even the local dialects during their service, further displaying the success of the language training.

The main focus of the volunteers’ skills training, within the “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers” program, is the Teaching as a Foreign Language (TEFL) skills. As the volunteers’ positions, within the program, pertain to college-level English teaching, they do not require relevant professional or work experience for potential applicants. Nonetheless, while English may be their mother tongue, many volunteers lack the language teaching skills required of English teachers within Chinese colleges. To enable volunteers to adapt better to the English teaching environment of China, the program engages experienced Chinese teachers as Peace Corps volunteers and staff to administer training in TEFL skills to trainees. These teachers and volunteers, with prior teaching experience; will train volunteers in the nuances of English language teaching. At the same time, the Peace Corps staff will provide comprehensive knowledge about the overall economic and political environment of China.

The “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers” skill training program constitutes teaching practice as its core element. Before their job commencement, students partake in a two-week internship that entails teaching English to local students in model schools in China. Volunteers often acknowledge teaching practice as the “[...] most challenging, yet rewarding experience” during skill training (Peace Corps, 2013). Furthermore, the program offers trainees health and safety knowledge training during the pre-service training stage. The health training content focuses on the Peace Corps medical policy, the health issues that may arise in China, and relevant preventive health measures. In comparison, safety training aims

to foster the development of measures to reduce safety risks in residence, work and travel environments.

3 INTEGRATION ROOTED IN CITIES: VOLUNTEERS' ACCULTURATIVE EFFECT IN CHINA

Volunteers of the “US-China Friendship Volunteers” program live in large cities, presenting a unique challenge for their integration with the community compared to volunteers living in small towns and rural areas. However, as their integration is not limited to their immediate surroundings, they can use the convenient transportation conditions available in the city to expand their activities and engage with the social culture all over China. With extensive exposure to the social culture of China, Peace Corps volunteers in China successfully promote mutual understanding and exhibit distinct integration characteristics related to acculturative strategies. As a sub-project of the Peace Corps, the expectations and requirements for the volunteers' cultural adaptation in China are consistent with those of other Peace Corps projects. The specific objectives of this program are set based on the general official purpose of the Peace Corps. Volunteers are expected to adopt an integrated overall strategy for cultural immersion in China, integrate themselves into the working environment of their posts, adapt to the life of the service community, and promote mutual understanding and exchange between Chinese and American people. The investigation report of the Peace Corps and the volunteers' memoirs note that, while the “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers” program focuses mainly on fusion in its Chinese cultural adaptation, it stands out with its unique qualities compared to other Peace Corps projects.

It is worth noting that, since the the volunteers of the “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers” program live in cities and work as college English teachers, they have less urgency to communicate with the locals outside of work. In contrast, many Peace Corps volunteers, in other host countries, live in remote towns or rural areas, which requires them to turn to the residents in various situations. For instance, volunteers living in rural areas have a daily life that primarily relies on the help of the locals. They may often need assistance from local people to get ingredients, help cook food, guide them and install or maintain facilities in their homes. Compared to volunteers living in high-rise apartment buildings, these rural volunteers have more opportunities to interact with locals, making it easier for them to socialize with the community. However, the “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers” program is primarily located in major cities such as Chengdu, Chongqing, Guiyang and Lanzhou, where transportation systems and commodities are highly accessible and convenient. Therefore, they can still maintain a relatively normal life even if they do not have substantial communication with the local people. Furthermore, since they all live in apartment buildings, they have fewer opportunities to socialize unnaturally with neighbors.

Since the volunteers of the “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers” program are college English teachers, most of their students already have a good grasp of the English language. Additionally, their colleagues speak English, and the teaching language and textbook are in English. Moreover, their schools employ foreign teachers other than the Peace Corps volunteers. Consequently, they do not have the same degree of urgency or complexity to communicate with the locals as volunteers engaged in agricultural projects in rural areas. Therefore, they receive much less attention. Overall, the Peace Corps volunteers in China tend to interact less frequently with the local people than volunteers in other host countries. According to the Peace Corps volunteers’ memories, who served in China, some volunteers actively integrate into the local social culture (Meyer, 2017; Levy, 2011; Hessler, 2002), while others hardly integrate into the local community (McCallum, 2011). According to the Peace Corps survey data in 2011, only 33% of Chinese volunteers interacted with the local people several times a day or a week in their communities and families. In contrast, the corresponding data for European, Mediterranean and Asian (EMA) volunteers were 58%, and among the global volunteers, 59% of them thought they had “adequate” or better community integration. Moreover, the corresponding data for EMA and global volunteers, in 2012, were 86% and 90%, respectively (Peace Corps, 2012).

However, these findings cannot be attributed to the volunteers’ lack of willingness to integrate, nor do they necessarily indicate that they have put less effort toward integration. Similarly, these findings do not reflect an inadequate level of communication achieved by the volunteers. Given that the volunteers reside in relatively developed metropolises, live in enclosed apartments and work as college English teachers, every interaction they have with local communities is likely to be their positive effort towards integration. They proactively create circumstances for interaction with the local population. Compared to volunteers situated in underdeveloped areas, they are less inclined to seek local support in their daily lives and work, and more likely to construct opportunities for mutual understanding and communication. Despite the difficulties encountered during community integration, most volunteers remain committed to interacting with local populations (Peace Corps, 2012). A 2009 survey, conducted by the Peace Corps, of volunteers serving in China (with 99% of them having served for more than eight months), revealed that 71% of volunteers believed their service had significantly or exceptionally contributed to promoting the understanding of the American people by Chinese people. Additionally, 67% of volunteers believed that their service had considerably or exceptionally contributed towards fostering greater understanding, among American people, of the Chinese people (Peace Corps, 2009). These findings demonstrate that the vast majority of volunteers are not deterred by difficulties encountered during community integration. Instead, they persist in surmounting these challenges to ultimately achieve a more favorable outcome in promoting mutual understanding.

Moreover, the unique service environment of China and the specific design of the “U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers” program afford volunteers a broader cultural adaptation experience in China, enabling them to develop a more comprehensive understanding of serving the local community and the entire Chinese society. In the enclosed social environment of urban living, the volunteers’ service has the challenge to achieving the community integration, while the urban transportation infrastructure provides ample opportunities to explore and engage with the city. Moreover, the extensive transportation network in China allows volunteers to explore and experience different areas throughout the country. Many volunteers utilize their downtime to visit famous cultural sites and obscure corners of their host city and even venture into rural communities to gain insight into local customs and traditions. During holidays, many volunteers take advantage of their stipends or pay out-of-pocket expenses to travel to other cities and regions in China to experience their unique cultures. For instance, Peace Corps volunteer Evan Leibowitz taught English at Lanzhou Agricultural University in Gansu Province from 2013 to 2015. During his two-year service, Leibowitz utilized the public transportation system of the city to traverse Lanzhou. During winter and summer vacations, he traveled extensively across China, visiting many locales (Leibowitz, 2015). While Leibowitz’s interaction with his immediate community may have been limited, his extensive travel has granted him a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the Chinese society, particularly in large metropolitan areas with millions of inhabitants and where transportation infrastructure is relatively convenient, unlike the rural or small towns where mobility can be challenging.

CONCLUSIONS

Compared to projects in other host countries, the most distinctive feature of the Peace Corps project in China is that the volunteers are primarily serving in big cities. The cultural adjustment environment for Peace Corps volunteers in the metropolitan areas of China also differs from the portrayal often emphasized by the Peace Corps, which focuses on volunteers adapting to rural areas with underdeveloped social and cultural conditions. While volunteers in the big cities of China enjoy relatively superior material living conditions, they face more significant challenges posed by cultural differences. The Peace Corps provides effective cultural learning content and methods during the pre-service training of volunteers, enabling the majority of them to integrate well into the local social environment.

It is worth noting that China is a unique member among the many host countries of the Peace Corps. During the Cold War, the Peace Corps was once regarded as a pragmatic tool to win over the neutral forces in the majority of developing countries, with neutrality essentially referring to its stance towards the Western powers led by the United States and the socialist forces represented by the Soviet Union and China. After the dissolution of the

Soviet Union, China has become an absolute protagonist in one of these opposing forces. In other words, the entry of the Peace Corps into China meant entering the internal sphere of the former hostile force. However, we also need to be aware that the more politically unique a country is, the more it tests the true political nature of the Peace Corps.

The development process of the Peace Corps in China demonstrates that, as an independent agency of the United States federal government, despite its efforts to pursue political neutrality, it is difficult for the organization to escape the fact that it serves as a tool of American pragmatic diplomacy. The development process of the Peace Corps in China clearly contradicts its proclaimed political neutrality. The entry of the Peace Corps into China, with its growth and eventual termination, closely paralleled the development of China-U.S. relations. Overall, the developmental trajectory of the Peace Corps project in China indicates its significant role as a component of American pragmatic diplomacy.

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