

Title: Korean War POWs' Individual Gastrodiplomacy: Comparing Morris R. Wills and Clarence Adams' Odyssey

Author: Yanli He

Affiliation: Brandeis University

Abstract: How does food operate as a medium for informal diplomacy between individuals and nations? In what ways do citizen culinary diplomacy and individual gastrodiplomacy diverge from official or state-sponsored culinary exchanges? This article examines these questions through the experiences of two American POWs from the Korean War, Morris R. Wills and Clarence Adams, focusing on food as a site of private, people-to-people interaction. As POWs in Korea and later as foreign guests in China, Adams and Wills navigated identities suspended between official representation and personal agency, granting them unique access to Chinese diplomats and political elites. How did their trajectories evolve after returning to the United States during the Cultural Revolution? Wills attained a prestigious position at Harvard in the late 1960s, while Adams became the first African American millionaire through his ownership of a Chinese restaurant chain in the 1970s. While Wills prioritized survival—securing basic livelihood—Adams leveraged culinary entrepreneurship as a means of self-empowerment. Adams' story, in particular, illuminates the role of semi-official food diplomacy and citizen culinary diplomacy in fostering cross-cultural understanding during a critical phase of U.S.-China relations.

Keywords: citizen culinary diplomacy; individual gastrodiplomacy; Korean War; Morris R. Wills; Clarence Adams; POW

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1. Introduction

What role can food play in diplomacy when practiced not by states but by individuals, especially under conditions of war, displacement, and survival¹? This article examines this question by analyzing two twentieth-century memoirs in which soldiers and prisoners of war negotiate cultural and political difference through acts of cooking, eating, and remembering. More specifically, this article examines POW memoirs as cultural and political texts that reveal how food practices mediate diplomacy under extreme conditions, a subject that has only recently begun to attract wider scholarly attention². While the concepts of gastrodiploacy, culinary diplomacy, and food diplomacy³ are often associated with official, nation-led strategies, these texts reveal that food also enables forms of citizen diplomacy that complicate the boundaries between the personal and the political.

¹ Food diplomacy, culinary diplomacy and gastrodiploacy are nation-oriented, in the context of collective and national identity, such as American culinary diplomacy project: <https://www.state.gov/diplomatic-culinary-partnership/>. Soldiers are naturally having collective identity to serve their country, but they also have individual identity in daily life, hence for food diplomacy, culinary diplomacy and gastrodiploacy studies, it's important to include soldiers' experiences. Because soldiers are a special group who have in-between collective and individual identities. So far, very few scholars did this research. For example, Kelton Rhoads discussed a soldier's experience of food helped him shape his understanding of people-to-people relations through food exchange. When this American soldier was in Mosul, he worked with an Iraqi counterpart, one day "a guy" from Iraqi counterpart gave him a bag of vegetables: "he just puts them on my desk! Now what was I supposed to do with a big bag of vegetables?" Later, this American soldier consulted their army cultural expert about what it meant and got this following instruction: "give this guy some food in return. So, the next day I gave him a box about the same size as the bag he gave me, filled with food. Seemed to work out pretty well." See Kelton Rhoads' "The Primacy of Culture as Influence: A Dissenting View," in Nancy Snow, and Nicholas J. Cull's *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*. New York: Routledge, 2020, pp.177-178.

² It is worth noting that POW literature has recently begun to attract increasing scholarly attention. For example, Terry Lautz devotes a chapter to Wills and Adams in *Americans in China: Encounters with the People's Republic* (Oxford University Press, 2022). In addition, Grant Mullins's BA Honors thesis, *Prisoners of the Press* (University of Michigan), approaches the topic from cultural and political perspectives and reflects the growing interest in this field.

³ For the definition of gastrodiploacy and food diplomacy, see Paul S. Rockower's "Recipes for gastrodiploacy" (2015, online piece). For the definition of culinary diplomacy and its distinction of gastrodiploacy and food diplomacy, see Samuel Chapple-Sokol's "A New Structure for Culinary Diplomacy" (28 August 2016), <http://culinarydiplomacy.com/blog/2016/08/28/a-new-structure-for-culinary-diplomacy/>, and her contribution of culinary diplomacy, <http://culinarydiplomacy.com/>. This article is trying to analyze Korean War American POWs' experiences of food, so its individual, personal and private level of gastrodiploacy, culinary diplomacy and food diplomacy, therefore this article uses Chapple-Sokol's concept of citizen culinary diplomacy, also add another term—individual gastrodiploacy, to cover Rockower's idea of "people-to-people connections through the act of breaking bread." In this article, citizen culinary diplomacy and individual gastrodiploacy is interchangeable.

I argue that these memoirs demonstrate how the preparation, sharing, and even imagination of food constitute a form of political engagement at the cultural level, one that is shaped by but not reducible to the histories and policies of nation-states. Through the embodied experience of food, soldiers and prisoners articulate identity, forge unexpected solidarities, and contest the abstractions of national politics. In doing so, they reveal how diplomacy occurs not only in official halls of power but also in the mess halls, kitchens, and memories of individuals living through conflict. By situating these works within the broader context of twentieth-century political history and food studies, this article expands the scope of what counts as diplomacy. It suggests that attending to individual gastrodiploacy can deepen our understanding of how cultural practices mediate political relationships across borders, particularly in times of war.

Twentieth-century U.S.-China relations underwent dramatic transitions, shifting from allies during World War II to adversaries during the Korean War, and later returning to a form of cautious alliance. The outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 profoundly influenced bilateral relations for the next two decades, as the shift from former wartime partners to enemies eroded much of the original American sympathy for a struggling China. The conflict also marked several historic firsts: it was the first direct military confrontation between the United States and the newly established People's Republic of China, and the first time 21 American prisoners of war chose to settle in China rather than return home. Among them, 2 POWs published memoirs: Morris R. Wills' *Turncoat: An American's 12 Years in Communist China* (1968) and Clarence Adams' *Clarence Adams: An American Dream: The Life of an African American Soldier and POW who Spent Twelve Years in Communist China* (2007). This article focuses on comparing the journeys of two individuals from their time as POWs during the Korean War to the peaks of their lives—Wills securing a job at Harvard in the late 1960s, and Adams becoming the first millionaire to own a chain of Chinese restaurants in Memphis in the 1970s. Central to this comparison is their relationship with food and diplomacy.

2. Knowledge of China and the Road to Korea

In chapter IV “Decision”, Wills emphasized his knowledge of China, socialism, and communism. He divided his perception of China into two stages: the first during the Korean War, before he was captured as a POW, Wills thought “China was a terrible tyranny where innocent people were shot and killed and put into prison.” When he became a POW, his views of the Chinese changed, and he described the Chinese camp as “Everything was nice, sort of an orderly planned way for everyone to live together.” (Wills and Moskin 59) By December 1952 or January 1953, Wills felt that if given the opportunity someday, he would like to visit China. Inspired by this thought, he attempted to speak with the Chinese guards but received a negative response.

Regarding socialism and communism, Wills described his initial perception—formed before going to Korea—as largely based on the education he received in school⁴: “I had never heard of Marxism...Marx had never been mentioned in our school... When I was

⁴ His education background is “a junior in high school”, and he “did about average”.

in school, communism may have occupied about five minutes in our old history book.” (55) In fact, the history book Wills mentioned did not cover communism, Marxism, modern China, or the Chinese people at all. According to Harold R. Isaacs, in 1942, four months after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, an opinion poll found that “60 percent of a national sample of Americans could not locate either China or India on an outline map of the world.” (Isaacs 37) Even after the attack on Pearl Harbor, China’s representation in American geography textbooks, maps, and atlases remained very peripheral from 1944 to 1953. For example, “a study of geography texts being used in American elementary and secondary schools as late as 1944 showed that all, without a single exception, contained world maps which placed Europe—or more specifically, England—at the center, along the Greenwich meridian.” (42) In this way, those textbooks “made it necessary to bisect the Pacific longitudinally just west of the tip of Alaska, with all of Asia thus placed to the east of Europe.” (42) That is why the term “the Far East” got its “persistently surviving” meaning. As for textbooks per se, according to the database in *Treatment of Asia in American Textbooks*, in 1944 “an average of about 7 percent of all the space in elementary and secondary school geography texts was devoted to Asia.” (47) Because of the Sino-Japanese War (1931-1945), China and Japan occupied most of the space, but China’s images related to “pigtails, bound feet, rice, invention of gunpowder, and a picture of a primitive irrigation wheel in a rice field or of the Great Wall, a pagoda, or a shrine.” (47) Similarly, in world history textbooks, “an average of 9 percent was given over to Asia”, and “this space normally mentioned the travels of Marco Polo, Genghiz Khan and the Mongol invasions.” (48) In short, both history and geography textbooks devoted very little space to China, and the positive portrayals were mostly associated with ancient China. For example, “26 world history books and 18 geography texts published between 1902 and 1917” have “1 to 1.5 percent of the contents devoted to China.” In 1939, “a total of 3 percent in world history texts devoted to China and Japan,” (48) and the image of China in “high school” textbooks were tied with those events: “[China] the Opium wars, John Hay and the Open Door, Boxer Rebellion, 1911 Revolution, Sun Yat-sen.” (49) Japan’s invasion and fascism portrayed China to Americans as a very weak country—one marked by poverty, backwardness, misery, disease, hunger, famine, and ignorance—eliciting American sympathy. This perception made the appearance of American servicemen in China during World War II a heroic phenomenon, which was not necessarily tied to Chiang Kai-shek’s financial arrangements for American forces, nor to the events of Pearl Harbor. Likewise, after World War II, American mapmakers redrew textbook maps from two new perspectives. Firstly, they “began to take a somewhat more patriotic view of the world”— “instead of Europe, they place North America in the world’s center.” More specifically, they “moving the center of the world from Greenwich to the longitude of Peoria, Illinois.” Secondly, they left “Japan and a chunk of eastern Asia visible on the west,” as well as Soviet Central Asia, e.g., Rand McNally’s *Cosmopolitan Atlas* (1953) keeps the old “divided Pacific,” but also “shows a map on which the dividing line is drawn through Soviet Central Asia, along the borders of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and past the

city of Bombay on India's west coast." (42)⁵ From August 1945 to October 1949, due to the Chinese Civil War and the Truman administration's support of Chiang Kai-shek, China's image began to shift—from a weak "Yellow China" associated with the "Yellow Peril" to "Red China," perceived as a follower of the Soviet Union. Similarly, due to the post-World War II conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States, which was reported by George F. Kennan in "The Long Telegram" (1946), any wars and events linked to Russia and its allies, especially those from the East, were described as "Communist-Soviet penetration."⁶

The use of traditional Orientalism to explain the Red Scare and the spread of socialism and communism shaped Cold War ideology in American history textbooks, domestic policy, and foreign policy. Hence, regarding textbooks, as Wills noted, Marxism and communism received very little coverage, and the history of China was divided into six stages: "the Age of 1) Respect (Eighteenth Century), 2) Contempt (1840-1905), 3) Benevolence (1905-1937), 4) Admiration (1937-1944), 5) Disenchantment (1944-1949), 6) Hostility (1949-)." (Isaacs 71) As a result, the majority of soldiers sent to Korea since June 1950, most of whom had only elementary and secondary education, lacked sufficient or accurate knowledge of Marxism, socialism, communism, or China. This led Wills to suggest that there should be an entire course on China and Russia, including "intellectual discussions, not just fanatical declarations," and "current affairs courses should follow every move of the Chinese and Russians with background material." (Wills and Moskin 55)

Regarding U.S. foreign policy toward Mainland China, two intertwined complexities were difficult to unravel. One was digesting "who losing China."⁷ Since October 1949, the theories on how the U.S. "lost China" has been widely discussed. Those theories including "Soviet intervention⁸, State Department communists, White House cowards, military and diplomatic folly, communist dupes and fellow travelers in the media...treachery everywhere..." For example, Senator Joseph McCarthy described the Truman

⁵ In this way, this atlas misguided students, e.g., as Isaacs mentioned "the literal-minded schoolboy, shown this map and asked to define the 'Far East' would look carefully and reply: 'Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan'. He might then, quite logically, call India the 'Far West', China would then become, no doubt, the 'Middle West' and Japan the 'Near West'.

⁶ <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/coldwar/documents/episode-1/kennan.htm>

⁷ Losing China was difficult to accept for a long time. With the intensification of Cold War competition after World War II and the tensions of the Korean War, those "Old China Hands" were not only suspected but also subjected to trials. For more detail, see James R. Lilley, Jeffrey Lilley. *China Hands: Nine Decades of Adventure, Espionage, and Diplomacy in Asia*. PublicAffairs, 2005; E.J. Kahn. *The China Hands*. Viking, 1975; John S. Service's *Lost Chance in China: The World War II Despatches of John S. Service*. Vintage Books, 1975; and Nathan A. Pelcovits' *Old China Hand and the Foreign Office*. New York: American Institute of Pacific Relations, 1948.

⁸ According to William Blum, "in 1947, General Marshall stated publicly that he knew of no evidence that the Chinese communists were being supported by the USSR," see *The CIA: A Forgotten History*. London and New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd., 1986, p.18.

administration was “composed of ‘egg-sucking phony liberals’ who protected the ‘Communists and queers’ who ‘had sold China into atheistic slavery.’” (Blum 18) The other issue involved plotting the possibility of Chiang’s return to the mainland. During the Chinese Civil War, despite beginning to withdraw some of its military forces from China as early as 1947 United States’ “aid and support to the Chiang government continued in one form and another long afterward.” (17) By 1949, U.S. Aid to Chiang’s government since the war “amounted to almost \$2 billion in cash and \$1 billion worth of military hardware, 39 Nationalist army divisions had been trained and equipped.” However, Chiang dynasty collapsed, and “the Generalissimo and his cohorts and soldiers fled to the Chinese island of Taiwan.” (17) Additionally, according to Chalmers Johnson and Simeon Man⁹, since 1950, one key element of U.S.-Asia relations was U.S. militarism and empire.¹⁰ The U.S. employed two primary strategies to militarize Asia: establishing overseas military bases and sending military advisors to train local forces, as well as providing opportunities for Asian personnel to train on U.S. military bases. Taiwan was involved in both of these militarization processes. Because Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek was “Washington’s man,” he was “as anti-communist as they were” and “a born American client”, so Chiang’s forces would be “properly trained and equipped to do battle with the men of Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-lai.” (15) Troubled by these two complexities, the U.S. government refused to recognize the legitimacy of the new China, and the CCP-led China's involvement in the Korean War was defined as “Red Chinese Imperialism”. Chiang’s presence in Taiwan also altered the dynamics of U.S.-Taiwan relations with the new China, as follows:

Prior to the communist victory, the US Government entertained no doubts that Taiwan (Formosa) was part of China. Afterward, uncertainty began to creep into the minds of Washington officials. The crisis was resolved in a remarkably simple manner: the US agreed with Chiang that the proper way to view the situation was not that Taiwan belonged to China, but that Taiwan *was* China. (17)

More precisely, the name of Formosa or Taiwan became the only legal China, as Secretary John Foster Dulles’s called as “Free China” and “the Republic of China.” This is because since the end of World War II, “neither Taiwan (Formosa) nor the islands of Quemoy and Matsu have ever been under the authority of the Chinese Communists.” (Dulles and Eisenhower) Furthermore, the Free China became the only legal representative of China in United Nations (UN), and Chinese was divided as “Chinats” and “Chicomps.”

⁹ See Chalmers Johnson’s *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (2004, New York: Metropolitan Books), and *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (2000, New York: Metropolitan Books); Simeon Man’s *Soldiering through Empire: Race and the Making of the Decolonizing Pacific* (2018, Okland: University of California Press)

¹⁰ Regarding the empire of America through militarism that started in the Philippines, please see Daniel Immerwahr’s *How To Hide An Empire: a History of the Greater United States* (2019, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux), and Christopher Capozzola’s *Bound By War: How the United States and the Philippines Built America’s First Pacific Century* (2020, New York: Basic Books).

In this context, the new China—Red China, socialism, and communism—were viewed as negative and illegitimate, no longer deserving sympathy from the majority of American leaders, politicians, and military officers like MacArthur. However, in the case of the Korean War—and war itself—it's important to emphasize that, while political leaders and public intellectuals played key roles, individual enlisted citizens, especially those who were domestically marginalized yet traveled internationally in military uniform, may have held different perceptions of their enemies. For example, before the Korean War, both Willis and Adams had very little knowledge of China, socialism and communism. In fact, compared to Wills' little knowledge, Adams, as a minority subject to Jim Crow laws and white supremacy, had almost no knowledge at all. Only after being taken as POWs did they begin to learn about China, socialism, and communism. It was this shift, along with their personal experiences on the battlefield, that shaped their decisions to choose China.

3. POWs and Citizen Culinary Diplomacy & Individual Gastrodiplomacy

At seventeen, on July 27, 1950, Wills “sworn into the Army.” (Wills and Moskin 24) In this sense, Wills' reason for becoming a soldier had a long-term goal—a deliberate choice to leave behind his life as a farm boy. Nevertheless, as a farm boy, Wills never had to worry about food, which is different from Adams' case. Adams' journey to both the U.S. Army and Korea was different from Wills. Born in 1929, Adams never met his biological father and was raised by his mother, stepfather, and grandparents in Memphis. As an African American, even as a teenager, Adams had already noticed that white and Black folks ate different foods. For example, ever since a teenager, Adams knew Justine --“the best and most expensive restaurant in Memphis” in Mrs. Johnson's house was a place that “only rich white folks go there.” (Adams and Carlson 8) However, Adams had opportunities to visit for two reasons. First, his cousin Glida Lee, whose father Colonel George Washington Lee was wealthy, took him once. Although the meal cost over \$100, Adams' first experience wasn't enjoyable—he didn't even like the food. Second, Adams often accompanied his stepfather, who worked at Mrs. Johnson's home, where he once “stole a can of rattlesnake meat to see how it tasted,” because he thought “if rich people eat snake, I've got to try some.” It ended up as he didn't like it and threw it away: “rattlesnake meat was one of the few things rich people had that I did not want.” (8-10) Additionally, Adams had “another strange experience with white people's food when he was eleven or twelve years old.” He walked to a middle-class neighborhood, where an older white woman asked him if he wanted something to eat. Though Adams was not hungry, he was “curious about what white people ate.” He entered her house through the back door because, at that time, “blacks were not allowed to go in the front door of white houses.” The kind woman poured him a glass of goat's milk, which he had never tasted before. When she left the room, he noticed that the milk didn't smell good, so Adams “poured it out in the sink.” (11) Based on those two unpleasant experiences, Adams concluded that there were clear differences between African American and white folks' eating habits:

We did not eat like white people. We ate our own food, and as a result, black kids

were stronger and healthier than most white kids. Our basic foods were greens, beans, and cornbread. We ate a lot of vegetables than meat. Meat was only for Sunday, when we might have chicken or some kind of pork with gravy and rice. White people ate the best parts of the hog; we ate what was left. When I was a kid, we'd go to this Jewish butcher store, Le Belies, and they'd give us neck bones. I used to carry big grocery bag of neck bones home that I got for free. They were great for making soup. Of course, I'd be spitting out bones all day after eating that soup. We also ate chicken feet and chitlins, which are cooked pig intestines, but this kind of food made us strong. (11)

As a strong young man, Adams was interested in boxing, and when white kids bullied him, he fought back. However, this often resulted in the police showing up at Adams' home, forcing him to run away. This is because "to be able to run fast was an essential survival skill for black kids in Memphis," and whenever he saw cops, his "first reaction was always to run." (12) Consequently, he "ran out to the back door and down the railroad track and kept right on running until got downtown to Front Street, where there was an army recruiting station." So, "right then and there, on September 11, 1947," Adams "joined the army." (22) He was tested at the recruiting station and scored high enough that he "could have joined the Air Force," but he chose the Army instead. There was a troop train "leaving that very afternoon for Biloxi, Mississippi," (22) hence, that very afternoon, Adams boarded the train and began his journey of military service. After completing basic and advanced training as a machine gunner in the infantry in December 1947, Adams was immediately deployed for his first tour of duty in Korea, where he was in the 159th Military Patrol for almost a year, until the Americans and the Russians agreed to pull most of their troops out of Korea in 1948. Later, he was stationed in Japan until August 1950, when he received orders to return to Korea.

When Wills and Adams both arrived in Korea, each coming from a different background, what did it mean for them to serve as soldiers in the Korean War? How did their experiences differ from the perspectives of officers, intellectuals, and political leaders? Why did they decide to go to China after the end of the Korean War? The perspectives of political leaders, high-profile military officers, and public intellectuals shaped the definition and expectations of the Korean War in three key ways. Firstly, the U.S. forces were described as a "police action" as President Truman called it¹¹, to "contain" the Soviet and

¹¹ According to John Toland, on the morning of July 29, 1950, the Department of Defense from MacArthur's headquarters got "more accurate information" that "it was doubtful that the Han River line could be held". Before noon, Secretary of Defense Johnson "phoned Truman that the situation was so grave there should be another meeting of his advisers that afternoon". At 4:00pm, an hour before President Truman scheduled meeting, he held a press conference. When he asked, "Are we or are we not at war?" Truman's answer was: "We are not at war". Then the question continued as: "would it be possible to call this a police action under the United Nations?", "Yes, that is exactly what it amounts to", said Truman. In other words, as John Toland concluded, for Truman, Korean War was "a police action taken to help the UN repel a bunch of bandits", please see John Toland's *In Mortal Combat: Korea*,

Communism expansion to the Free World as Kennan suggested in his cable. Secondly, the conflict between MacArthur and Truman for fighting a “limited war.” As a legendary World War II general, MacArthur was not aiming for a “limited war,” he was “looking for leverage to extract consent for the type of operation he long had wished to execute.” (Pearlman 57) At the beginning of the war, MacArthur promised that “a giant pincer movement would crush the enemy between a ‘hammer and an anvil,” and “by seeming to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.” (57) Furthermore, MacArthur “even suggested, perhaps partly in jest, that if the troops advanced fast enough, ‘maybe some of them could be home by Christmas.” (Peters and Li 48) However, Truman administration kept considering “Korea strategically unimportant in the context of a possible global war.” (Pearlman 66) Eventually, MacArthur was pulled out of the battlefield.

Thirdly, there was a conflict between the strong desire for victory to defend peace and America, and the reality of ill-equipped American soldiers. At the beginning of the Korean War, three factors fueled American soldiers’ expectations of victory. MacArthur’s existence— “the legendary hero of World War II” with “five stars” that outranked all Joint Chiefs of Staff and the UN forces.¹² The backward of North Korean air force, which “equipped with Soviet-built WWII aircraft offered no serious challenge.” Additionally, the unlikely possibility that Soviet and Red China would intervene that predicted by MacArthur¹³ and General Bradley – chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Originally, the UN force resolution was “provided authorization only to repel the North Korean army, not to invade North Korea.” (Peters and Li 37) However, after the Inchon Triumph, Bradley “persisted” and “supported by the CIA” that “neither the Soviets nor the Chinese

1950-1953. New York: Open Road, p.69. However, according to Michael D. Pearlman, it’s on June 29, 1950. And in Truman’s words: “If we are at war, declared war with any nation”, Truman later told Korean War veterans, “then the military are in control in the field and that’s an Army of the United States. Where we are in action in conjunction with the United Nations to prevent aggression, that’s a police action to prevent the whole world from being involved, see Pearlman’s *Truman & MacArthur: Policy, Politics, and the Hunger for Honor and Renown*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008, p.65.

¹² In many ways, the UN forces were influenced by U.S. forces, particularly by MacArthur’s decisions. As MacArthur noted in his memoir, the decision regarding UN forces in Korea was made in the absence of the Soviet Union: “the Russians, who were boycotting the United Nations in protest against membership of the Chinese Nationalists, did not have a delegate present,” please see Douglas MacArthur. *Reminiscences: General of the Army*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001, pp.494-495.

¹³ When asked “as to the chance of Red China’s intervention,” MacArthur’s answer was: “my own local intelligence, which I regarded as unsurpassed anywhere, reported heavy concentrations near the Yalu border in Manchuria whose movements were indeterminate, that my own military estimate was that with our largely unopposed air forces, with their potential capable of destroying, at will, bases of attack and lines of supply north as well as south of the Yalu, no Chinese military commander would hazard the commitment of large forces upon the devastated Korean peninsula. The risk of their utter destruction through lack of supply would be too great”, see Douglas MacArthur. *Reminiscences: General of the Army*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001, p.536.

Communists were prepared to risk global war over Korea.” (37) According to MacArthur, there was “never serious danger of active Soviet intervention.” This is because “the Russian policy is not to sacrifice its own troops, but to use those of its friends,” and “the enormous expansion of Soviet influence since the end of World War II has been brought about without the Russian soldier firing a shot in battle.”¹⁴ Therefore, in Korea, when “Communism had hurled its first challenge to war against the free world,” it’s the high time for the U.S. Army and the UN force to decide that “it was as clear as it would ever be that this was a battle against imperialistic Communism.” (MacArthur 494) In a word, Korean War was considered as a “police action” for justice, for victory and glory.

Regarding the Korean War, Wills, out of admiration of MacArthur, fully agreed with his idol’s idea of fighting a hard war against China, rather than a “police action” or “limited war”. However, when Wills arrived on the battlefield in Korea, he encountered only mountains, freezing weather, fierce enemies, dead bodies, wounded troops, starvation, poverty, and prolonged suffering—in stark contrast to MacArthur’s prediction of returning home by Christmas Eve. In addition, when MacArthur was relieved of duty, Wills became angry and began to draw a distinction between himself and “them”—the politicians, elites and intellectuals who hold on noble positions. Not long after MacArthur was relieved, Wills was captured, which made him even angrier than before. As a POW, he marched north, where every day and night were a matter of life and death. When Wills finally settled, he realized that, day after day, he could only “start at the huge mountain right ahead” and “couldn’t see over it.” Hence, Wills knew “the best years” of his life was “rotting away.”¹⁵

As POWs, regardless of their skin color, both Wills—captured on May 18, 1951—and Adams (captured on November 30, 1950) endured similar hardships, primarily due to a lack of food. Wills vividly described his experience of hunger and citizen culinary diplomacy/ individual gastrodiploamacy in the POW camps. To illustrate this, he recalled a brief episode involving a can of lima beans he had thrown away while traveling from Japan

¹⁴ Douglas MacArthur. *Reminiscences: General of the Army*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001, pp.595-596. However, this point was not correct, because new Soviet archives have “now confirmed that Soviet pilots were flying the MiGs, using bases in North Korea and Manchuria.” Those pilots were required by Soviet authorities to “do everything possible to conceal their true nationality. They wore Chinese uniforms, were restricted from flying over UN-controlled territory, and were forbidden (in theory) from speaking Russian in radio transmissions.” Thus, if they were captured, they were “expected to identify themselves as Chinese of Russian extraction.” Under this situation, one Soviet pilot who was “shot down behind UN lines ejected safely and then shot himself,” please see Richard Peters and Xiaobing Li. *Voices from the Korean War: Personal Stories of American, Korean, and Chinese Soldiers*. Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004, p.47.

¹⁵ In fact, the U.S. government did think about using the atomic weapons, see Dwight D. Eisenhower. *Mandate for Change, 1953-1956*. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1963, p. 180. Similarly, Wills supported to use atom bomb: “if we’re going to fight this war, then fight it. Bring over what’s necessary and go ahead and win it. If it means dropping an atom bomb, then drop an atom bomb.”

to Korea¹⁶, which came to symbolize his desperate longing for food, the meager rations in the POW camps, and the grim reality of starvation among the prisoners— “Giveupitis.” Those POWs were mainly city boys, rather than countryside like Wills himself.¹⁷ This is because those city POWs wouldn’t eat “dry cooked red grain with maybe a few hard wild weeds on top,” which tasted “like swallowing a bowl of sand, spoonful by spoonful.” The direct negative effect on body is “this food gave you awful cramps. The indigestion was terrible. Every day, every night. You’d have to move around to get the gas up. It burns and burns and burns.”¹⁸ Later, began to receive tobacco, which became more valuable than money or even friendship,¹⁹ it was also at this time that POWs began engaging in their own form of citizen culinary diplomacy/ individual gastrodiplomacy as followings:

We started getting a little square box of tobacco, made in China, every once in a while. I didn’t smoke, so I gave mine to my friend from Florida or traded it for sugar, later on when they started giving us a sugar ration which amounted to three tablespoons a week. (Wills and Moskin 43)

At that stage, having food to eat provided mental comfort for the POWs, helping them endure their hardships.²⁰ However, it’s important to recognize that citizen culinary

¹⁶ “On the ship from Japan to Korea, I did something I have regretted all the rest of my life. We were issued C rations. Well, I’d never liked lima beans, and C rations often had a can of lima beans and ham in them. I opened my C rations and there was a can of these damned lima beans. I tried to give them away, but nobody would take them. When we got to Pusan harbor on January 16, we were ordered not to leave anything on the ship. I had to do something with the lima beans, so I threw them out the porthole. I’ve never regretted anything more in my life. While I was a prisoner starving in North Korea, that’s all I could think of that can of lima beans, lying on the bottom of Pusan harbor. That thought stuck with me throughout my time in prison. I was starving and I have thrown away a can of lima beans. Every time I would think of food, I would think of lima beans. I’d wasted it when people were starving” see Morris R. Wills and J. Robert Moskin. *Turncoat: An American’s 12 Years in Communist China*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968, p.26.

¹⁷ Regarding this, Wills and Adams had similar point, according to Adams, normally “city boys, and most of them were white” would say that they couldn’t eat uncooked grain, see Morris R. Wills and J. Robert Moskin. *Turncoat: An American’s 12 Years in Communist China*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968, p.49.

¹⁸ Morris R. Wills and J. Robert Moskin. *Turncoat: An American’s 12 Years in Communist China*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968, p.37.

¹⁹ In Wills’ words, “Money is completely useless. I’ve seen men burn it up, use it for toilet paper. Tobacco, salt, something to eat, that’s the only thing that has value. A grain of tobacco becomes more precious than a five-dollar gold piece. Men would fight over a quarter-of-an-inch cigarette butt,” Morris R. Wills and J. Robert Moskin. *Turncoat: An American’s 12 Years in Communist China*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968, p.38.

²⁰ Wills described a moment when he collapsed into the mud, lying there, thinking only about food: “I lay there thinking of food. I could just see it--- laid on a nice table with a clean white tablecloth, a glass

diplomacy, or individual gastrodplomacy, among POWs was a noble act. Often, their reality wasn't about peaceful exchanges but involved violent conflict:

We were a ragged bunch of soldiers--- hungry, dirty, unshaven, usually in pain. We were mostly Americans, a few British, a few Dutch, a few Turks. Everyone was just trying to exist---- to survive. No one was able to take charge. Every value you ever had, every standard, is slowly crushed...They would fight over a spoonful of rice. (38)

Adams described a similar longing for food among POWs. During the march to the POW camp, he experienced extreme hunger. As he passed a Korean house, a kind woman offered him water to drink. Then, he noticed "some corn mush bubbling away in a big wok," he was desperately hungry, so he "reached into that wok and grabbed a handful of corn mush." (38) Nevertheless, it was "scalding hot," so Adams' hand was burning, and the "skin was coming off" his hand, but he ate "every grain, skin and all." (38) Adams arrive at Camp 5 on December 10, 1950, along with 500 POWs. The daily ration in Camp 5 "consisted of a cup of hot water and maybe a quarter cup of uncooked corn, beans, or sorghum." (49) While one POW complained that "that's what we feed our farm animals," some "hungry eyes scrutinized his every hand movement." (49) Some POWs ate part of their ration, and "saving the rest for later," (50) but in POW camps, this was not even a wise choice.

In Spring of 1951, when the ground began to thaw, Adams and others began "digging for roots," and tried to eat everything they found, including "plants." (51) For Adams, his favorite part was had "four or five small, starchy lumps on its roots that tasted slightly sweet, like coconut," so anytime that he could "dig up a handful of these roots was a good day." (51) Additionally, Adams described instances of racism against soldiers of color in the POW camps: "there was racism in the prison camps just as there had been in the army."²¹ For example, "there were still those whites who openly called us niggers and told us what they would do to us when they got us back in the States."²²

Adams also highlighted the racism he faced beyond the army and POW camps. As an African American soldier in uniform, he encountered discrimination when he went to eat at a restaurant in Boston. Originally, he had believed that racism didn't exist in the North.

of water, some nice silver. And I lay in the mud, filthy, with all this noise and confusion going on around me," Morris R. Wills and J. Robert Moskin. *Turncoat*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968, p.41.

²¹ Regarding the racism among the army, please see David P. Cline's *Twice forgotten: African Americans and the Korean War, An Oral History*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2021. United States Army Center of Military History's *Black Soldier-White Army: The 24th Infantry Regiment in Korea*. Scotts Valley: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014. Charles M. Bussey's *Firefight at Yechon: Courage and Racism in the Korean War*. Lincoln: Bison Books, 2002. Curtis "Kujo" Morrow's *What's a Commie Ever Done to Black People? A Korean War Memoir of Fighting in the U.S. Army's Last All Negro Unit*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 1997.

²² A white prisoner even coming to Adams in Camp 5 and saying to him: "Nigger, if I had you back home, you wouldn't talk to me like this," see Morris R. Wills and J. Robert Moskin. *Turncoat: An American's 12 Years in Communist China*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968, p.53.

However, he realized he was wrong when, despite the absence of any “whites only” sign, no one came to serve him after he was seated²³. It was racism that ultimately drove Adams to choose to go to China:

I never became a Communist or a Chinese citizen, not even after my many years in China. I was looking for something much more fundamental. I wanted to be treated as a human being, and I wanted the opportunity to live a better life. (59)

Regarding the reasons for choosing China, what specific motivations does Wills articulate, and how do they reflect broader historical or cultural interests? In addition, what kinds of relationships can be drawn between Wills, Adams, and the role of food — not only as a personal or cultural experience, but also as a medium of communication and negotiation? How do these relationships further illuminate the practices of citizen culinary diplomacy and individual gastrodiploamacy, particularly in shaping cross-cultural understanding and informal international relations?

4. Wills’ Role of Rome vs. Adams’ Odyssey to be a Millionaire of Chinese Restaurants

Regarding his decision to attend study groups in the POW camps and his ultimate choice to go to China, Wills framed his narrative around two key words: disappointment and the American Dream. In the POW camps, Wills sought a way to escape the disappointment and anger.²⁴ Wills said he was “give in to those realities” and began to “search for

²³ In Adams’ word: “I learned the hard way that bigotry in the North was different than in the South... I figured... there I was, an American soldier all dressed up in my spanking new uniforms, ready to defend my country, and determined to eat breakfast in this supposedly free and equal North... I started looking for this restaurant of my dreams, and not far from train station I found it. There was no ‘Whites Only’ sign hanging in the window, so I went in and took a seat. Two white waitresses were leaning on the counter talking to each other. I sat there, expecting one of them wait on me. They looked over at me but kept right on talking... I glanced around the restaurant and saw that they only people there was a bunch of old white men drinking coffee and reading the morning paper. I noticed that they were peeking over their newspapers at me, obviously wondering what I was doing in their restaurant. I began to get really nervous. I simply did not know how to act in the North. I took a half-dollar out of my pocket and tapped it on the table. The waitresses again looked at me but went right on talking. Finally, a white man came in, took a seat, and immediately received service... In the South I always knew where I was not allowed, but in the North there were no ‘Whites Only’ signs. This was even more degrading... I knew I had to leave, but the walk from that table to the exist was the loneliest I have ever taken...” See Morris R. Wills and J. Robert Moskin. *Turncoat*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968, pp.25-26.

²⁴ Wills’ own words are “I filled the vacuum left by my becoming dissatisfied with my own government by taking an interest in China, Chinese and communism--- by reading and by developing a friendship with the Chinese. It opened a way forward, I found another path out.” See Morris R. Wills and J. Robert

something else, something to stand on.” (Wills and Moskin 56) Hence, he started to join study groups, go to libraries, and read books. Towards the end of his time as a POW, Wills became the leader of his squad. He also developed a new understanding of socialism, China, and his American Dream. Regarding socialism, Wills “felt that socialism and eventually communism, were far higher stages of development than capitalism.” (66) Regarding China, because of his “sympathetic to communism,” Wills felt “it seemed like a very orderly, systematic way of organizing society, no one was very rich, and no one was very poor. Everyone shared equally, more or less.” (60-61) Eventually, in summer 1953, when the agreement was signed for voluntary repatriation, Wills’ intention to visit China became a reality. On February 24, 1954, Wills crossed over the Yalu River into China. His first impression when he looked out of the window was “misty and cold----very dark, very gray and very cold.” At that time, he was on a path toward his understanding of the American Dream: “I was only doing this so that someday I might be able to help America in a different way,” and “later on I would help to change the system.” (63) Although Wills didn’t directly connect the material benefits, he received from joining the study groups, he did mention the improvements in food during Christmas:

For Christmas, we each got treats, including a whole dried fish. We hadn’t seen this much meat in six months. I ate the bones and head and all. We sat around and sang songs: the Negroes led us in singing spirituals. (49)²⁵

Similarly, Wills devoted little attention to the material improvements he experienced after arriving in China. Clear differences emerged between Wills and Adams in their motivations for returning and the ways they navigated their paths home. Wills shaped his narrative to align with the expectations of the mass media and his job at Harvard. Nevertheless, Wills’ approach-- “Now that you are in Rome again, you’d better act like a Roman,” (Adams and Carlson 121) in his own words, should be viewed through the lens of the historical circumstances that shaped and constrained them.

In 1953, when it became known that Wills and other “turncoats” had chosen to go to China, the mass media focused on explaining why these Americans would choose to live in what was considered enemy territory. Popular media offered two main explanations for the choices made by these POWs. One explanation was that they had been brainwashed, a term coined by American journalists in the Far East, Edward Hunter. At the beginning of the Korean War, Hunter published *Brain-Washing in Red China: The Calculated Destruction of*

Moskin. *Turncoat*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968, p.58.

²⁵ It’s important to aware that during the Korean War, both North Korea and China were very poor. In the case of China, after over a decade of war, including Japan’s invasion, and the Civil War, the new China was not yet reconstructed. Lacking enough food was a normal phenomenon for the mass. Chinese soldiers in the battle filed suffered lacking food, clothes, boots. The situation of Chinese POWs was even worse, because the POW camps were guarded by the former nationalist army soldiers, in general, both for the supply of daily living materials modern weapons, Chinese soldiers faced more severe hardships than other soldiers on the Korean War battlefield.

Men's Minds (1951), marked the beginning of a trend in which the term “brainwashing” was used to “help” the American mass to “understand” the mysterious Oriental power, intertwining the concepts of the Red Scare and Yellow Peril. From 1956 to 1958, Hunter extended his brainwashing theory in *Brainwashing: The Story of Men Who Defied It* (1956) and *Brainwashing: From Pavlov to Powers* (1962), and *The Black Book on Red China: The Continuing Revolt* (1958). Following Hunter’s lead, Richard Condon wrote the novel *The Manchurian Candidate* (1959), which sold so well and was produced as a movie in 1962 by John Frankenheimer. When journalism, literature, and film converged, “brainwashing” became a catchword used to explain the negative consequences of the Korean War, especially when Dr. Joost Meerloo draw a parallel between “brainwashing” and “psychological rape” in his book: *The Rape of the Mind: The Psychology of Thought Control, Menticide, and Brainwashing* (1956). The other explanation focused on the family and personal issues faced by the POWs. Family problems were often attributed to maternal influence, with analysis centering on the close or distant relationships these POWs had with their mothers.²⁶ Additionally, personal issues included the POWs’ homosexual orientations, which were portrayed as contributing to a perceived lack of manliness.²⁷

However, none of the aforementioned propaganda and descriptions may represent the core reasons behind Wills’ choice. Despite this, after his return in 1966, he did emphasize the concept of “brainwashing”: “although I did not think so at the time, I suppose you might say I was brainwashed.” (Wills and Moskin 67) There were two more compelling reasons behind Wills’ choice. The first was his actions in the POW camps, which included serving as a leader, attending study groups, and signing peace petitions. The second reason involved the consequences faced by two “turncoats” – Edward Dickenson and Claude Batchelor. They changed their mind by midnight January 24, 1954, after having “rethought their decision to stay with the Chinese and returned to United Nations lines.” However, at that moment, the remaining 21 became “expatriates,” and “the United States, which had fought so hard for the return of these men, began exacting revenge on the two who had returned.” Consequently, those 21 POWs “became the scapegoats for McCarthy’s America.”

²⁶ Mothers were blamed to be responsible for Korean War veterans’ “softness”, which was named as “momism”. “Momism” was introduced by Philip Wylie in his non-fiction essays: *Generation of Vipers* (1943). For more information, please see Eugene Kinkead’s *Why They Collaborated* (1959), and *In Every War but One* (1959), Michael Rogin’s “Kiss me Deadly: Communism, Motherhood, and Cold War Movies” (1984), Elaine Tyler May’s *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (1988), and K. A. Cuordileone’s *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (2005). Kinkead’s two books with different titles but essentially identical content.

²⁷ “Softness”, “Pinko” and “homosexuality” were three keywords for describing Korean War American soldiers’ “pro-Communism” and feminization, especially the 21 American POWs who had refused repatriation to the United States, they were defined as “soft men” who “overbearing American mothers” and “bound together more by homosexuality than Communism”, Matthew W. Dunne’s *A Cold War State of Mind: Cultural Constructions of Brainwashing in the 1950s*, PhD dissertation, 2008, p.133. More materials, please see John D’Emilio’s *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (1988).

(McKnight 1) Corporal Edward Dickenson was the first POW from the Korean War to be court-martialed for “collaborating with the Reds” on 4 May 1954, and after a close of 11 days of trial, sentenced to “ten years confinement at hard labor, total forfeitures of all pay and allowances, and a dishonorable discharge.”²⁸ Batchelor’s court-martial followed Dickenson’s in September 1954, but took twice as long as Dickenson’s trial. Eventually, Batchelor was sentenced to “a dishonorable discharge, total forfeiture of pay, and twenty years confinement, he spent four and half years in military prison before his parole.”²⁹ Within this historical context, Wills, in the 1960s, deliberately shaped his narrative to align with the expectations of the mass media and to consolidate his job at Harvard. He primarily focused on justifying his departure from China, portraying his life there in overwhelmingly negative terms, partly to align with the anti-China sentiment during the Vietnam War. He rarely mentioned his wife or mixed-race children. Nevertheless, it remains important to acknowledge the difficulties Wills faced in surviving and maintaining a normal life after the Korean War.

Therefore, this section will focus on Adams’ journey of citizen culinary diplomacy/individual gastrodiplomacy. Unlike Wills, Adams did not mention food much during the study groups. However, since February 24, 1954, when he boarded the train to cross the Yalu River en route to China, Adams’ connection with food—and even concepts of culinary diplomacy and gastrodiplomacy—can be understood through four main stages. The first stage is Adams’ early days in Taiyuan of Shanxi Province, and Beijing. Shortly after the 21 POWs arrived in Taiyuan, they met representatives from the Red Cross Society, who took them to a compound where they were able to take showers. Afterwards, they were guests of honor at a tremendous banquet. Adams had such a deep impression of this banquet:

In my entire life I have never seen so much food. There was a long table covered with everything you could imagine. We hadn’t eaten well in several years, so it was difficult to handle such rich food. I wanted to eat everything on the table, but my stomach couldn’t take it. (Wills and Moskin 73)

After a couple of weeks, Adams and others were given some spending money, so the first thing they did was “go into an ice cream and cookie shop,” and all asked “washbasins,” rather than “small scoop of tiny cup.” (74) After Taiyuan, Adams moved to Beijing to study the Chinese language for two years before enrolling as an undergraduate student at Wuhan University in Hubei Province. In Wuhan, Adams met Liu Lin Feng, his future wife, who came from a wealthy family, was well-educated and worked in Wuhan Polytechnical University. After their relationship was officially established, Adams’ living conditions

²⁸<https://www.thefreelibrary.com/The+trial+of+a+Korean+War+%22turncoat%22%3A+the+court+martial+of+Corporal...-a0354196810> and see Raymond Lech’s *Broken Soldiers* (2000).

²⁹ <https://scholarship.law.unc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=4107&context=nclr>, Elizabeth Lutes Hillman’s “Disloyalty among Men in Arms: Korean War POWs at Court-Martial”, *NORTH CAROLINA LAW REVIEW*, Vol. 82, 2004.

dramatically improved. With a full scholarship, Adams' life had already improved significantly, but when Lin began serving as his Russian interpreter, the quantity, variety, and quality of food available to Adams changed dramatically, e.g., "there was plenty of food, drink, and black caviar." Though Adams didn't care much for caviar—"those salty fish eggs or the black bread the Russians put them on," he did "certainly enjoy the free whisky and vodka." (86) On December 20, 1957, Adams and Lin got married. Wuhan University provided a room for them, and they invited around 50 people; however, over 100 uninvited guests showed up. Fortunately, the cooks from the university cafeteria had prepared enough food for everyone. Additionally, some foreign students gave them wines, candies, and cigarettes. Two former American POWs, Harold Webb and Richard Corden, came too, since they also studying at Wuhan.

The third stage took place back in Beijing. After Adams graduated in 1961 with a bachelor's degree in Chinese language and literature, he found a job at the Foreign Languages Press. Since then, Adams and Wills worked together, along with William White, and they met W.E.B. Du Bois and his wife Shirley Graham, during their visit to China. It was also on that day that they dined with Premier Chou En-lai. Since then, Adams started to spend more and more free time with African diplomats, including representatives of Ghana, Guinea, and Mali, the three African embassies then in China. Additionally, Adams also "established good relations with the Cuban embassy," (97) and visited Ceylon and Indian embassies. With those diplomats, Adams enjoyed a variety of drinks and foods. It may have been then that the seeds of food diplomacy were planted in his mind in two directions. On one hand, he became a translator between African diplomats and Chinese officials, while serving as an official translator for the Foreign Language Press, which shaped his understanding of diplomacy, particularly in meetings with top leaders like Mao Zedong and Chou En-lai, and other famous foreigners in China like Sidney Shapiro, Isreal Epstein and Sidney Rittenberg. On the other hand, Adams developed a distinctive understanding of food, food diplomacy at the official level, and citizen culinary diplomacy/ individual gastrodiplomacy while working in Beijing. Many of his interactions with diplomats revolved around meals, drinking, and socializing. Regarding China's gastrodiplomacy, Michelle Tien King described the banquets held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing for Richard Nixon and the American delegation as "a signal moment of gastrodiplomacy" and "culinary and diplomatic performances writ large."³⁰ However, China has a long tradition of hosting foreign delegates with elaborate Chinese cuisine. During his time in Beijing, Adams had numerous opportunities to participate in these diplomatic events, which likely influenced his perception of culinary diplomacy and individual gastrodiplomacy, perhaps even unconsciously.

The fourth stage occurred when Adams returned to the United States during the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution. Adams left China during the Cultural Revolution, mainly because Lin's wealthy and educated family was the major target of the Red Guard. Additionally, Adams mentioned the 1964 Civil Right Act meant that his family could "possibly have a life in America," because before such laws, taking his "interracial family

³⁰ See Michelle Tien King's *Culinary Nationalism in Asia*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.

to the South was out of the question.” (Adams and Carlson 103)³¹ Nevertheless, Adams went through a long, twisting journey before he became his own boss and became a millionaire through the food business. Additionally, Adams faced much greater hardships than Wills putting the food on the table for his interracial family in the South. Upon returning Memphis, although Adams was “impressed that the ‘Whites Only’ signs had disappeared from the train station,” (117) a suitable job was not easy for him and his interracial family. In terms of food, even his daughter Della faced hardships when she tried to open the fridge at home. But gradually, Lin and Adams’ auntie Bea Adams (King Adams’ wife) established their citizen culinary diplomacy/ individual gastrodiplomacy: “Bea would often invite us over for a meal and then have a long conversation with Lin,” then “Lin taught her how to cook Chinese, and she taught Lin how to cook America.” (130) Later, Adams found jobs as a salesman, driver, and in other roles. During a strike, when strikers spotted Adams, he was in trouble, but he used his “22-caliber pistol” and “a large butcher knife” to defend himself. Consequently, the rest of the day the strikers kept shouting to Adams: “Commie! Nigger! Red! Go back to China!” (135)

Luckily, in Adams’ words, upon realizing that the strikers would seek revenge on him “in the worst way,” then “strangely enough,” Adams’ life was completely reshaped by the exhibition of “the Chinese Ping-Pon team played in Memphis.” This exhibition was a following up event to the U.S.-China diplomatic engagement— “an American team had gone to China in the spring of 1971 as part of President Nixon’s Ping-Pong diplomacy.” (135) When China team was making a reciprocal ten-city tour of the U.S., which included coming to Memphis in the spring of 1972, one of the Chinese diplomatic representatives—Alvin King knew Lin and invited her family to attend official parties. Eventually, Lin and Adams went to the exhibition and afterwards went on a cruise on the Mississippi with the Chinese delegation. At that time, while the strikers threatened Adams, the visit of the Chinese delegation also significantly altered the course of his life. Therefore, in July 1972, Adams and Lin decided to be their own boss, and opened their first Chinese restaurant—Chop Suey House on Airways Boulevard.

The food business flourished, thanks to the establishment of official U.S.-China foreign relations following Nixon’s visit. Soon, Adams and Lin bought the Mallory house as their first home, then in November 1973, they purchased the second home in Memphis on Windward. Subsequently, they maintained their operations by opening and managing a series of Chinese restaurants, contributing to the culinary landscape and the promotion of Chinese cuisine in the local community. For example, in 1974, they opened “Mei Lin Chinese Restaurant,” in 1976, they opened the second Chop Suey House, in 1983, the third Chop Suey House, in 1984, the fourth Chop Suey House and Rhapsody International Cuisine Restaurant. In 1986, they purchased their third home in Memphis on Green Belt.

³¹ For the historical event that made U.S. High Court abolished interracial marriage ban, please see the Loving vs. Virginia case, and Patricia Hruby Powell’s *Loving vs. Virginia: A Documentary Novel of the Landmark Civil Rights Case*. Chronicle Books, 2017; and Phyl Newbeck’s *Virginia Hasn’t Always Been for Lovers: Interracial Marriage Bans and the Case of Richard and Mildred Loving*. Southern Illinois University Press, 2008.

With good business, fortune and fame, they opened China House Restaurant in 1989, and Beijing Chinese Restaurant in 1990.³²

Ultimately, from 1950 to 1990, Adams experienced a remarkable odyssey, transitioning from being a POW in Chinese camps to becoming the first African American millionaire in the Chinese food industry. His life journey vividly illustrated the multifaceted relationships between food, people, and diplomacy. This includes the citizen culinary diplomacy and individual gastrodiploamacy experienced by POWs as they endeavored to survive; his role as a translator between African and Chinese diplomats; and his participation as an honored guest at the Chinese Ping-Pong team exhibition, all of which are connected to official food diplomacy. Additionally, as the owner of a chain of Chinese restaurants that served cuisine throughout the United States, Adams engaged in a form of semi-food diplomacy. This entrepreneurial venture was intricately nurtured by the official U.S.-China diplomatic relations established in the early 1970s, exemplifying the ongoing influence of diplomacy on culinary practices.

In conclusion, the intertwined journeys of Adams and Wills reveal how food, beyond its material necessity, became a crucial medium for informal diplomacy and cultural negotiation. Their experiences demonstrate that citizen culinary diplomacy and individual gastrodiploamacy can operate powerfully alongside, and sometimes in contrast to, official state narratives. Their wartime experiences expose not only the complex entanglements between war, prisoners of war, and the politics of food, but also the profound human suffering that lies beneath these intersections. Their journeys reveal how individuals are caught between state agendas and personal survival, forced to navigate deprivation, ideological conflict, and cultural dislocation. Food, often regarded as a basic necessity, emerges here as both a lifeline and a battleground for identity, dignity, and hope. Through their stories, this article critiques the dehumanizing effects of war, which reduces individuals to instruments of broader geopolitical struggles while simultaneously denying them agency. Ultimately, Adams' and Wills' trajectories remind us that behind every grand narrative of conflict lie countless untold stories of hardship, resilience, and the quiet struggle and adjustment for humanity amidst war.

³² For the details, see Della Adams and Lewis H. Carlson. *Clarence Adams*. Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007, pp.148-149.

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