The China factor figured significantly in President John F. Kennedy’s halting progress toward détente with the Soviet Union, in his quest for a nuclear test ban, and in his handling of the Vietnam issue. Moreover, the notion of a decisive contest with the Chinese over Third World allegiance both fuelled and colored official interest in the Asian-African arena.¹ No full-length study, however, has made the Kennedy administration’s China policy its principal focus.

This paper represents an initial attempt to redress one major gap in the literature: the American intelligence process with regard to domestic developments in China, particularly the Chinese famine and intraleadership trends. The extent of recent declassification allows for such an undertaking. True, a comprehensive reconstruction of this dimension of China policy cannot be attempted at present. Narrow on clandestine gathering methods, the source base available sheds but oblique light on such aspects as the role of the Defense establishment, the extent of intelligence collaboration with other governments, the posture of individual China watchers of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the standard dissemination structure of pertinent information.² The more limited yet feasible research objective of this essay is


² Available is a good portion of the materials of the White House, State Department, and the CIA’s analytical wing. Still far less accessible are the papers of the Department of Defense and the CIA’s operational wing. That Washington and London had no established mechanism for comparing China-related information is also quite clear. By mid-
threefold: probing the state of American knowledge of China's crisis, tentatively accounting for gaps in this knowledge, and assessing American performance.\textsuperscript{3} That the United States was concurrently the nation uniquely positioned, if not inclined, to ease the famine,\textsuperscript{4} and, conversely, to underwrite Jiang Jieshi's "reoccupation" schemes validates such an exercise still more.\textsuperscript{5}

Between 1959 and 1962, a horrendous and momentous famine struck China. According to one authoritative estimate, 14 to 26 million people perished.\textsuperscript{6} Although fully realized in the West only recently, the catastrophe's staggering scope has come to form a point of consensus across an otherwise widely divergent historiographical spectrum of China scholars.\textsuperscript{7}

\textsuperscript{3} Previous treatments of this topic have been few, partial, and oblique. See especially Fetzer, 188–93; Ray S. Cline, Secrets, Spies and Scholars: Blueprint for the Essential CIA (Washington, D.C., 1976), 172–82. This paper employs two notions of intelligence in tandem. One broad definition essentially encompasses that part of information processing which markedly influences policymaking. See Wesley K. Wark, "In Never-Never Land? The British Archives on Intelligence," \textit{Historical Journal} 35 (1992): 201–2. Robert Jervis utilizes a somewhat narrower sense, the function of discerning other states' intentions and capabilities, in "Strategic Intelligence and Effective Policy," unpublished conference paper, September 1989, 1.


\textsuperscript{5} During the first half of 1962, Jiang Jieshi quite conspicuously stepped up his "reoccupation" schemes. Upon his American visitors, Jiang urged the necessity to seize the unique and momentary opportunity created by the convergence of several factors: famine and turmoil on the mainland, acute Sino-Soviet discord, Chinese Nationalist military prowess, Jiang's still-considerable personal stature and Communist China's lack of nuclear capability. The fragmentary information at hand suggests the American establishment split into champions and opponents of this thesis. This policy debate, still partially under the security seal and peripheral to this paper's focus, runs through much of the following discussion. Cf. Roger Hilsman, \textit{To Move a Nation} (Garden City, N.Y., 1967), 310–11; Elvis J. Stahr, Jr., "Oral History Interview," 18 Aug. 1964, 51, John F. Kennedy Library (JFKL), Boston, Mass.; "Prospects of Early Nationalist Military Action Against the Mainland," Kent to Dulles, 27 July 1961, "China General 7/29/61-7/31/61," box 22, National Security Files (NSF), JFKL.
