

Smuggled diplomatic diaries from dawn of Cold War to be made freely available online

July 20 2016, by Cerri Evans

An extraordinary collection of diplomatic diaries smuggled from Moscow to Paris as Communism swept across the East almost 70 years ago will be digitized and made freely available online for the first time.

The writings of Fu Bingchang (1895-1965), China's ambassador to the USSR from 1943-49, offer a remarkable primary historical source, revealing in exceptional detail the personal tensions, rivalries and allegiances among and between world superpowers which shaped the outcome of World War II and sowed the seeds of the Cold War.

Fu was China's signatory on the 1943 Moscow Declaration between the Allied powers (giving China the veto it still wields today) and senior representative at the first ever meeting of the United Nations General Assembly in 1946.

He was also an avid diarist and amateur photographer. His personal archive includes 33 diaries, alongside numerous journals, news reports, telegrams, and photograph albums. The more than 3,000 photographs feature high-profile political figures such as US Secretary of State Cordell Hull and Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov.

This unique historical archive has for more than a decade been the focus of study for Dr Yee-Wah Foo, a political historian based at the University of Lincoln, UK, who is also Fu Bingchang's granddaughter.

She has now received funding to digitize, translate and annotate the

collection in full and make the materials freely available online. The two-year project has received a grant of 79,000 Euros from Taiwan's Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation in a collaboration between the University of Lincoln, UK, and Academia Sinica, the national research academy of Taiwan.

"There is very little information available from official sources about what happened at an ambassadorial level during this period in world history," said Dr Foo, Senior Lecturer in Lincoln's School of Social and Political Sciences. "Official archives are still closed, so this material is important from a historical sense, but it's also a true story and a personal story, told from a Chinese point of view. It's about the relationships between people suffering together through difficult times.

"I am extremely grateful to the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for their support in this project, which will enable researchers all over the world interested in 20th century political history to explore this unique source of primary material."

How Fu Bingchang's writings survived the last 70 years is its own story of political intrigue. In 1949, when the Communist Party swept away General Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government in China, Fu's papers were smuggled secretly from Moscow to Paris by an ambassadorial aide who dutifully kept them safe for more than 20 years in the same leather suitcases. Fu also escaped to France but was never reunited with his diaries. He moved to Taiwan in later life where he died in 1965, and was honoured with a state funeral. In the 1970s Fu's son tracked down Fu Bingchang's archive, and they were stored away as a unique family heirloom, moving eventually with the family to England.

Dr Foo's latest research examines her grandfather's involvement in diplomatic efforts to resolve the Iranian crisis of 1946 – a diplomatic incident triggered when Iran lodged an objection to the newly-formed

United Nations about the continued presence of Soviet troops on its territory. The crisis was high on the agenda at the 1946 UN Peace Conference, where Fu corresponded directly with Stalin to negotiate a settlement that appeased all four major parties: Iran, USA, USSR and China. It is seen as one of the first major incidents of the Cold War.

The full digital archive of Fu Bingchang's collection of diaries, journals and photographs is expected to be available online from early 2017.

Provided by University of Lincoln

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