Applicant: Jiafeng Chen

School: The Hun School of Princeton

Committee of Interest: Mao’s Yan’an Red Base

1. What interests you about China?

I came from China to the United States at age 15, before which I studied and lived in Shanghai. It was after I came to the United States that I realized just how different China is. As a Chinese national, I believe it is simply a personal duty to understand China.

Modern China is intriguing with its economic success combined with its brutal authoritarianism and illiberal economy. Despite continued economic liberalization, political liberalization remains a democrat’s daydream to this day, especially in light of recent events in Hong Kong, where President Xi and his puppet C.Y. Leung refused to compromise.

The political culture of China is unique, with its fierce nationalism and its communist-esque sense of equality, all the while complicated by its dividing inequality. China’s nationalism stems from its pride for its long history as a regional hegemon, until its defeat in the Opium Wars and humiliation at the hands of Japan, long regarded as China’s sidekick. Compounded with communist propaganda, Chinese nationalism has risen to a high and somewhat worrying level, with a militant populist attitude against Japan, whose nationalist Prime Minister Abe made matters worse. Chinese citizens share the sense of equality and of populism, as the remnants of its Maoist era and its Confucian heritage.

Understanding China’s history, especially the history of the CCP outside of official propaganda, is thus crucial to understand China today. I am thus very interested in understanding Mao’s Yan’an Red Base, where the cabals of revolutionaries around Mao became the first leaders of the People’s Republic.

1. What interests you about Communism?

Chinese nationals often have mixed feelings about Communism. On one hand, it is evident today that Communism has failed, with the Soviet’s collapse and the marketization of China. However, it is difficult for Chinese nationals to admit defeat, both from a national pride standpoint and a philosophical one, as Marxism has strong philosophical and historical roots. It is this complication that makes studying Communism very important for studying China

I have read the *Communist Manifesto* this past summer, in an attempt to understand the ideological roots of China today. I find Marx making a strong philosophical claim, from his analysis of human history, while Marx’s economic system inevitably contradicts modern economic theory and his political system has unequivocally failed. The apparent discrepancy between its philosophical soundness and its practical failure is an interesting one to explore.

Furthermore, having read only the orthodox works by Marx and Engels, I do not have a deep understanding of Leninist and Maoist extensions of Marxism, only knowing the textbook case that Leninism advocates for a professional revolutionary force, whereas Maoism puts Marxism’s emphasis on workers to an emphasis on peasants. Yet, since understanding these sects of communism is indisputably crucial, I would like an opportunity to research these topics.

1. Explain your experience doing role-play, in Model UN or any other activity.

I have been a Model United Nations veteran for five years. I have founded the Model United Nations club of my school. I have participated in 8 conferences in the United States and China. I have won awards in almost all of the conferences I have participated in, including a Best Delegate at Harvard Model UN 2012 and an Outstanding Delegate at ILMUNC 2014. I have participated in two crisis committees, one being the Chinese State Council at Seton Hall University and the other being a historical committee on 1848 European revolutions at ILMUNC. I believe I have strong experience and commitment in Model United Nations.

I also participated in 7 seasons of theater productions at the Hun School of Princeton. I have served the roles of actor, writer, producer, director, and technical crew, which also gives me experience in public speaking and role-play.

1. Do you have a particular interest in a certain time period, type of government, etc.? If so, why?

I am quite interested in the KMT government of 1927-1949 under Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek. I read, over the past summer, a book on the Chinese government of 1840-1919, and I am generally familiar with the Chinese government post-1949. Hence, the government under KMT is the one major time period with which I am least familiar with, and hence is currently the one I am most interested in.

The government is akin to a military junta, with Chiang virtually serving as military dictator, but the government also stabilized China after the chaotic period of local militias during 1912-1926. The militant resistance of CCP developed during this period, after the failure of Chiang to eliminate the CCP on the Long March. Thus, one could argue that this period virtually determined the next era of China. Thus the period of 1927-1949 is very interesting to explore.