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This book is about China’s vital but arguably underrated contribution to the Allied war effort during World War II. It is about the Chinese experience of war, the origins of modern Chinese identity, and the roots of twenty-first century Sino-American and Sino-Japanese relations. Interpretations of the war in China have been central in shaping Chinese and foreign views of China’s modern history, and crucial for understanding the simmering Chinese regime and popular anti-Japanese sentiments today. According to Rana Mitter, China was not just the forgotten ally, but also the one most changed by the experience of war.

In this revisionist work, Mitter proposes numerous new and revealing interpretations. He argues, for instance, that World War II started not in Europe, but with an accidental firefight at the Marco Polo Bridge, a few miles southwest of Beijing, in 1937. This is a major departure from the view contained in most world history books that WWII started when Nazi Germany invaded Poland in September 1939. In line with some other recent efforts in reassessing China’s wartime leader, Chiang Kaishek, most prominently in Jay Taylor’s *The Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-shek and the Struggle for Modern China*, Mitter is more sympathetic to Chiang than were many previous works. Despite everything — Japanese savagery, Allied indifference, domestic ruin, and internal dissension — China under Chiang did not submit to a militarily superior Japan. In fact, Chinese resistance was instrumental in the defeat of the Axis, tying down Japanese forces in what became known as the ‘China Quagmire.’ It is small wonder that the book has received much attention in China. A translated Chinese version was released in China in July 2014 --- less than a year after it was first published in English. It has thus received much attention and praises among Chinese readers.

Our three reviewers all agree that this is an important and powerfully written book on China’s experiences during World War II. Niu Jun notes that the views in the book “are very instructive,” and that *Forgotten Ally* reminds “Western readers not to forget this part of history, but also to remind Chinese readers how diverse and complex connotation included in it …” George Wei writes that “the book is very readable, interesting, and has an impressive narrative flow.” Although he has many reservations about the book, Steven Levine acknowledges the book’s “useful and thought-provoking contribution to the literature on China’s war with Japan.”

Levine’s main contention is that the book lacks a coherent analytic narrative and is hobbled by weak transitions between and even within chapters. He also disagrees with the term

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“forgotten ally,” pointing out that “China was not so much a forgotten ally as an ally that was mistrusted, condescended to, under-supplied, and disdained.” George Wei is concerned about Mitter’s “defense of Chiang Kai-shek wartime policies and decisions.” As he points out, “Mitter often uses words from Chiang’s diary to justify Chiang’s decisions in situations that offered no alternative.” Continuing on this theme, Wei (like Levine) finds it problematic that Mitter relies too heavily on the diaries of Chiang Kaishen and Zhou Fohai (an important figure in Wang Jingwei’s Japanese collaborationist regime).

Mitter’s book is a good read for the general market, but I feel it has major weaknesses that our reviewers describe. It does not quite hang together. It offers a good outline for a multi-volume history, but does not offer a decisive study of the period. While there are many good and even excellent books on various aspects of the China war in English, there likely is no one all-encompassing interpretive narrative of the war in all its facets. In many ways the history of this period may be underdeveloped compared with Cold War studies. Not surprisingly, given both cultural and linguistic impediments, Western scholarship and general books on WWII in Europe, especially various aspects of Nazi German policies and actions, are, in my opinion, more advanced than the literature on the war in Asia.

Participants:

**Yafeng Xia** received his Ph.D. in modern diplomatic history from the University of Maryland, College Park in 2003. He is Professor of History at Long Island University in New York and Guest Professor at East China Normal University in Shanghai. A former Wilson Center fellow and public policy scholar, he is the author of *Negotiating with the Enemy: U.S.-China Talks during the Cold War, 1949-72* (2006). He has also published many articles on Cold War history. His coauthored books, *Mao and the Sino-Soviet Partnership, 1945-1959: A New History* (with Zhihua Shen) and *Mao and the Sino-Soviet Split, 1960-1973: A New History* (with Danhui Li) are forthcoming with Lexington Books in 2015. He is at work on a book on the history of Sino-North Korean Relations during the Cold War (with Zhihua Shen).

**Steven I. Levine** is Research Faculty Associate in the Department of History, University of Montana. He received his Ph.D. from Harvard University in 1972 in Government and Far Eastern Languages. Among his publications are *Anvil of Victory: The Communist Revolution in Manchuria, 1945-1948*, and *Arc of Empire: America’s Wars in Asia from the Philippines to Vietnam*, co-authored with Michael H. Hunt. He translated from Russian and edited Alexander Pantsov’s authoritative biography of Mao Zedong, *Mao: The Real Story* (2012). He is currently working, inter alia, on a co-authored history of the Korean War as told from a Chinese perspective.

**Niu, Jun**, Professor in School of International Studies, Peking University, and received Ph.D. from People’s University of China in 1988. Niu been teaching courses in Peking University at present include Analysis of China’s Foreign Policies’ making, the Foreign Relations of Peoples’ Republic of China since 1949. His study is focused on China’s foreign policy making since 1949, and the United States foreign policy and the Sino-US relationship. Main publications at recent include: *From Yan’an to the World: The Origin and Development of


Rana Mitter is professor of the history and politics of modern China and director of the University China Centre at Oxford University. He is the author or editor of several books including The Manchurian Myth: Nationalism, Resistance, and Collaboration in Modern China (2000) and A Bitter Revolution: China’s Struggle with the Modern World (2004). His most recent book is Forgotten Ally: China’s World War II (2013) [title outside the US: China’s War with Japan, 1937-1945], which won the 2014 Duke of Westminster’s Medal for Military Literature, and was a 2014 CHOICE Outstanding Academic Title, a finalist for the 2014 Bernard Schwartz prize of the Asia Society, and a Book of the Year in The Economist and the Financial Times. He is currently researching the links between memory of wartime and Chinese domestic and international politics.
If I understand it correctly, Rana Mitter’s book *Forgotten Ally: China’s World War II, 1937-1945*, was written for American readers. Nonetheless, after its publication, the book also caused some concern among Chinese readers. There are two reasons: first, the history of China’s Anti-Japanese War is being re-examined and re-written in China and new progress is being made; while scholars are developing new ways of thinking about and understanding that period of history, the public maintains a sustained and passionate concern. Second, China has been gaining a place in the world ever since the mid-1800s; however, the relationship between China and the outside world has become more intensive. Not only have Sino-U.S. relations intensified, but Sino-Japan relations are almost reaching a rattling point. Rana Mitter clearly demonstrates at the beginning and end of his book, that his motivation in writing it was consistent with Chinese readers’ concerns.

*Forgotten Ally* opens with a rather fascinating story. The author begins with the Japanese bombing of Chongqing in the spring of 1939, then compared it with the “still, albeit uneasily, peace” (1) in Europe. This description impressed this reader deeply, since most world history books on World War II suggest that war broke out with the German invasion of Poland. By that time, however, 7000 kilometers away, China was already struggling independently with a brutal battle – it had fought against Japanese invaders in an arduous war for more than two years under very difficult circumstances. The Japanese air force’s bombing on Chongqing - the wartime provisional capital - caused the destruction and devastation of matter, lives, and human spirits. Nevertheless, it is now almost completely forgotten, if not unheard of, by the European and American public. The author argues that the ignorance of such an important piece of history is a major cause why the West failed to establish a sufficient rational relationship with a rising China. It is a point worth reflecting upon, even though I do not hold the understanding that this history will improve relations between the West and China. Incidentally, Chinese academics have suggested that if a country’s war against fascist aggression were to be counted, the outbreak of World War II could even be dated back to “Mukden Incident” in 1931, since Japan’s invasion of northeastern China and Chinese resistance to that aggression (although limited) had already began. Of course, the academic impact of this idea has not been significant; nonetheless, it is associated with the title of this book and its narrative logic.

The last part of the book discusses the problems that China faces in the twenty-first century, which of course have also become problems for other nations of the world. The author suggests that the problems faced by China today are inextricably linked with the Second World War, so it is necessary to re-examine that history. Undoubtedly, World War II, in a sense, was a war that connected China and the world. For instance, both Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong had formulated China’s stance and grand strategy against Japanese aggression, judging on the global trend; and they had both concluded that China could only insist on a lasting war, while the final victory of China would rely on the process and outcome of the world’s anti-fascist war. China had to decide to form a wartime alliance with other countries and fight with them side by side, based on this judgment.
The author argues that the Chinese war of resistance against Japan had always had a tremendous impact. As the author describes, in contemporary China, war-related memorials can be seen everywhere, and war-related topics are spreading throughout the press. Especially in recent years, it is true that China’s television dramas have been filled with the war against Japan, and newspapers also have published a variety of war memoirs and comments. This, of course, is also necessary in terms of foreign policies, as Mitter points out, since Chinese leaders describe China as a ‘responsible power’, and China’s policy analysts, diplomats, and so on often mention that at that time China was allied with the United States and Great Britain, fighting with them side by side. Strictly speaking, of course, the KMT leaders represented China rather than the CCP, and it was the Nationalist Government that was the ally of the United States and Britain. The author notes that Chinese people “draw a powerful parallel between a time when China cooperated against the forces of reaction, and present day, when China wishes to portray itself as integral and positive part of a new order” (7). This is a fairly accurate description and a sufficient explanation of the author’s basic judgment that the study of “China’s World War II” is crucial to understanding the rising China as a global power. Moreover, to understand the changing definition of identity of the Chinese people, as well as what role they deem China should play in a rapidly changing world order, it is necessary to know more about this history.

But objectively speaking, I question whether in Europe or Chinese academia it is necessary to further define the extent of the impact of the war of resistance against Japan on post-war China’s foreign relations, particularly with respect to issues such as Sino-U.S. relations. If one wants to find out the main source of the fundamental issues of China’s foreign relations today, such as the structural contradictions in Sino-U.S. relations mentioned in this book, one may rather find that studies of Cold War, the Chinese Civil War, and the Korean War can provide a more convincing explanation, since the root causes of the Cold War and the Chinese Civil War were not always related to World War II.

If it were not for the outbreak of the Cold War and the Chinese Civil War, the military, political, and other conflicts that occurred between China and the U.S. in World War II would have had very different implications and consequences. Especially after the Chinese Communist Party took power, the trend of China’s foreign relations had fundamentally changed, which had almost no connection with the war against Japan, at least not directly. International Cold War historians often trace such problems back to the USSR and the Comintern’s far eastern policy in the 1920s. To associate the war against Japan directly with relations between today’s China and the world is to perhaps simplify events.

Even today, there are at least three different stories about the history of Chinese war of resistance against Japan: the American and European side of ‘story’ in the East, the KMT side of ‘story’, and the CCP side of ‘story’. All of these stories narrate the same war, but they are entirely distinctive. Forgotten Ally was clearly written for Americans (and perhaps Europeans), but the author unfolds his narrative by dealing with many problems existing in American history books. The author may want to improve and update previous research, through which he can inspire the Americans to reflect on their country’s China policy. Through detailed descriptions of Chinese suffering in the war, the arduous battle that the
Chinese army fought, and the extremely difficult conditions faced by China, the book displays a picture for American and European readers of events with which they may not be familiar, including a death count of up to 14 to 20 million Chinese, and the behavior of U.S. General "Vinegar Joe" Joseph Stilwell, who treated Chiang and his subordinates arrogantly, and so on. As the author puts it, "the problem was that the Chinese and the Westerners looked at China’s role through almost entirely different lenses. To the Western Allies, China was supplicant, a battered nation on its knees, waiting for the Americans and British to save it from certain destruction at the hands of the Japanese. In Chiang’s view and that of many Chinese, their country was the first and most consistent foe of Axis aggression. Despite numerous opportunities to withdraw from the conflict, China had fought on when the prospects of outside assistance seemed hopeless, and it now deserved to be treated as an equal power” (243-44). This was the reasonable expectation, and also the source, of their resentments. Although Americans had done better than the British, nonetheless, it was still thought not to have been enough.

In his more detailed description of General Stillwell's experiences in China, the author has somehow changed American academia and critics’ views on this event of the last century, which profoundly influenced U.S. relations with Chiang Kai-shek regime. The main feature of this section focuses on the feelings and behaviors of Chiang Kai-shek, rather than those of the Americans. This book’s perspective in describing the Stillwell event may be relatively new, from the view of American readers, as it gives more sympathy to Chiang Kai-shek than before and a more specific analysis of the relationship. Although there has already been much research on the issue, the author's focus on Chiang’s statement transcends similar works that have been published previously in America. In addition, his analysis of the role of the British also enriches the reader’s understanding.

The above descriptions will certainly help support the book’s basic idea that the U.S. strategy determined the attitude of its allies toward China; the U.S. strategy was not formed overnight and was not immutable, and as a result the American attitude toward China blew hot and cold. On the one hand, many Americans, including President Franklin D. Roosevelt who sympathized with the Chinese people, strongly supported China as an equal ally, in spite of the British concern that China’s revival could destroy its vast colonies in Southeast Asia, starting with Hong Kong. However, this book’s viewpoint is similar to that of some of the writings of scholars in Taiwan in the 1970s. For example, they argue that China-U.S. discord was related to Roosevelt’s unwise appointment - he sent a narrow-minded General Stilwell who was in repeated conflict with the Chinese due to his contempt for Chiang Kai-shek, and the former even mobilized his troops and planned to give CCP military aid.


2 Liang Jingtuan, Stilwell Event (Shidiwei shijian), (Beijing: Shangwu yinshu, 1973); Guo Rongzhao, The Tragedy of China-the United States’ Cooperation during the Wartime [Zhongmei zhanshi hezuo zhi beiju, (Taipei: Zhongguo yanjiu zhongxin press, 1979)).
without any consultation with Chiang. This eventually led Chiang to get rid of General Stilwell, planting negative seeds in the relationship between the Nationalist Government and the United States, with long-lasting impact. Seen from the current research trend, debate over such issues will not follow. Due to the recent huge changes in Taiwan, relations between the Nationalist Government and the United States during the war with Japan did not interest in the KMT -- perhaps only American readers will continue to be interested, because the KMT has been localizing since the 1990s, its younger generation regards it a Taiwan’s party more than China’s one, they think their history is connected to Taiwan more than to mainland China.

Another history of the War involves the KMT side of story. In the KMT’s governing period on the mainland and its retreat to Taiwan, the war had been written as a glorious history of KMT defending its people’s rights and national interests. Nationalists believed that they led the Chinese war against Japan and they held out to the final victory against fascism, which formulated an important source of legitimacy and justification of their leadership. In the KMT’s historical narrative in those years, there are stories about how their great ‘Generalissimo Chiang’ led the war indomitably and ‘resisted foreign aggression and bullies’; there were also stories about how national army soldiers had fought a bloody war alongside the Allies, especially fighting against and annihilating the Japanese in Burma, etc. According to the KMT side of story, sustaining the Chinese battlefield relied on Chiang and the Nationalist Government’s insistence in the war - they had defeated the Japan’s attempt to destroy China rapidly by resisting in the vast area of Chinese land. In the battles of heroic resistance, the Chinese soldiers and civilians had paid a painful price.

In this regard, Forgotten Ally is greatly consistent with the Nationalist Government’s mainstream narrative, which highlights the huge contributions made by China to the Allies’ victory in World War II, as well as the painful costs paid by Chinese people in this yet tragedy. As the author points out, during the eight years from July 7, 1937 when the Marco Polo Bridge Incident broke out and China began its all-out war against Japan, to August 1945 when Japan announced its surrender, the Nationalist Government organized several large-scale battles, the capital was forced to move, China’s vast land was occupied by Japan, 80 million refugees emerged, and about 20 million soldiers and civilians died. The Nationalist Government often claimed that China had not been given the respect it deserved, or, more specifically, had not been given more aid. Forgotten Ally seems to argue that the amount of aid that the Nationalist Government received was proportional to its contributions.

On December 7, 1941, when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and the Pacific War broke out, the main goal of U.S. policy was to ‘keep China in the war.’ confining as much as possible the Japanese army within the Asian continent. Objectively speaking, since the Allies’ global strategy was ‘Europe first,’ the Asia-Pacific region was placed second in importance after the defeat of Germany. In the Asia-Pacific war against Japan, the U.S. Pacific Air Force’s

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naval and air combat was the main focus - in fact, the Japanese military’s main force included quite a few Japanese armies, which were fighting the U.S. military. China played an important but not a significant role in the overall strategy of the Allies, a fact which was somewhat embarrassing to the Nationalist Government. However, given the unsatisfactory military situation, in the spring of 1943, the Roosevelt administration proposed a more aggressive and ambitious idea, that the Soviet Union, the United States, Great Britain, and China would lead as the 'Four Powers' in the post-war world, in which China would play a vital role in post-war Asia and become a pillar in the American regional strategy. As Forgotten Ally described, China’s role as a semi-colonial victim of imperialism gradually evolved into that of a sovereign nation with larger regional and global responsibilities on the world stage, based on the idea proposed by the Roosevelt administration. Nevertheless, this did not become a reality after the war. The first reason is the poor governing capability of the Nationalist Government. Chinese troops had not performed strongly enough in combat for a long time, and especially in the campaigns of Henan, Hunan, and Guangxi launched in 1944 by the Japanese, they were disastrously defeated. The second reason is the rise of CCP during the war, which so greatly weakened the political influence of the Nationalist Government that at the end of the war the United States took pains to mediate KMT-CCP negotiations. Therefore, the impact of the war on China’s status in world may be important, but it is not as significant as previously thought. Chiang Kai-shek's overestimation of China’s position in world politics led to a strategic mistake just after the war - he thought no matter what the Nationalist Government did, the United States would eventually accept Chiang’s China. This illusory sense of a China as a world power was fatal to Chiang Kai-shek, and was also one of the main reasons leading to the Nationalist Government’s ultimate failure on the mainland.

The third narrative about the Chinese war of resistance against Japan involves the CCP side of story. Forgotten Ally is critical of the fact Western readers are unaware of the heroic resistance and the tragedy-sacrifice intertwined history that occurred in China at that time. Yet Mitter further points to the bizarre fact that not only for Western readers, but “even for the Chinese themselves, the events were concealed for decades. Yet they are part of one of the great stories of the Second World War, and perhaps the least known” (4). For decades, not only did foreigners’ interpretations of World War II often ignore the important role played by China, but so too were many Chinese people on the mainland not clear on the impact of China’s war of resistance against Japan on world history and Chinese history. This is highly related to the Cold War and China’s Civil War in the post-war period, especially when the CCP achieved victory in the civil war and started to recount this history according to its own view of revolutionary history and its needs in terms of its political struggles.

After the PRC was founded in October 1949, in the narrative of mainland China, the protagonists in combating Japan became the Chinese communists, who were defined as leaders and the ‘mainstay’ in the war of resistance against Japan. In contrast, according to this history Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT who were ‘passively anti-Japanese, and actively anti-communist’, hiding in the rear to preserve their strength during the war, and were ready to fight a civil war thereafter. In particular, Chiang Kai-shek created a dictatorship and the KMT were thoroughly corrupted. According to this argument that the CCP military
was the main force in the war, guerrilla wars were the main force of resistance against Japan. Movies, TV shows, cartoons and so on were filled with ‘tunnel warfare,’ ‘mine warfare,’ ‘armed working teams in enemy-occupied areas’ and other guerrilla campaigns. There were also the stories of the KMT army in the civil war that followed this portrayal. It is not hard to show China’s significant role in the war by filming such historical scenes. The author argues that this “caused collective amnesia of this period in mainland China,” which is not an exaggeration. Until now, many television programs have rarely presented the tragedies of the war, but rather contain the magical plots of drama. In short, the main theme of the war in this narrative was intended to prove the correctness of CCP and the reasonability of overthrowing the Chiang Kai-shek regime; as a result, people learned more of Yan’an - a place where the sun was shining, officials were honest and optimistic, civil-soldier unions were solid, and army troops participated in productive labor, and so on. By contrast, the KMT were portrayed as resisting passively, distrusting each other, and doing almost nothing in front line of the battlefield.

This narrating emphasis on the CCP revolution rather than the national liberation began to shift in the 1980s. With the emancipation movement, reform, and opening up, and the gradual reconciliation across the Taiwan Strait, the CCP narrative of the war incorporated more and more content, such as the fact that the CCP and KMT put the past aside and fought against the Japanese invasion side by side. It also emphasized more the Chinese nation’s common struggle for liberation. Since the 1980s, museums with a relatively objective presentation of the history have been gradually established around the country, such as the ‘Marco Polo Bridge Incident Museum’ near the Marco Polo Bridge in Beijing and the ‘Nanjing Massacre Museum’ in Nanjing, and so on. Academics have also begun the work of collecting and arranging literature on the war of resistance against Japan, and have produced a great quantity of academic works with richer contents and in-depth analysis; scholars sought to accurately represent all aspects of the war as specifically as possible. These efforts continue to enrich the historical pictures of the war, and the results diverge from the traditional historical narrative of the CCP. For example, there were more and more positive evaluations of the KMT army fighting in the war, which inevitably led to questions about who were the main force and who played a leading role in the war against Japan, and so on.

Compared with the historical narrative contents, more profound changes are taking place in Chinese historians’ research paradigms. Previous studies usually used a revolutionary history narrative, or a national liberation historical narrative of nationalism and anti-imperialism. In such a paradigm, in fact, a variety of interpretations of the war against Japan, as well as excavation of historical materials and concrete progress of specific studies, can still be inclusive to politics. What may have a greater impact on the future is the development of a ‘modernization paradigm’ and the controversies caused by this new paradigm, which examines the influence of the war of resistance against Japan in China’s modernization process.

For example, with the intensification of Sino-Japanese relations in recent years, a view emerged in China’s historical discourse that two Sino-Japanese Wars - the first Sino-Japanese War in 1894 and the eight-year war of resistance against Japan- interrupted
China’s modernization process. It is now difficult to predict how this view will be developed and what kind of impact it will have on academia; however, it does reflect the expansion of the ‘modernization paradigm’ to historical research of the war. It is very valuable for *Forgotten Ally* to have keenly reflected the impact of war on China’s modernization. This book points out, “In recent years the sheer scale in China has become apparent.....The great part of China’s hard–won modernization was destroyed, including most of the rail network, sealed highways, and industrial plants created in the first decades of twentieth century: 30 percent of the infrastructures in the rich Pearl River delta near Canton, 52 percent in Shanghai, and a staggering 80 percent in the capital, Nanjing” (5-6). With the deepening of research in this area, there will be further evaluations of the position of this war in Chinese history, which will certainly impact the Chinese view of the world – perhaps even more directly. If one confesses that China was in its process of modernization before the war broke out, then how should scholars evaluate the civil war at that time? Of course, *Forgotten Ally* did not unfold from this point of view; however, if we simply follow the course of history and delve into its true processes, we have to face the above issues sooner or later.

*Forgotten Ally* concludes that China’s war against Japan should not be forgotten by the Allies; from the perspective of this Chinese reader, it should not be forgotten by Chinese, and especially should be the correctly interpreted, since the impact of this war on China and the Chinese people has been extremely comprehensive. In this regard, many of the views in *Forgotten Ally* are very instructive. Chinese people have now come to the center of the world stage. In this respect, Chinese people today need to dig more meaningful contents from past history, learning from useful experiences and lessons. From this perspective, one can say that *Forgotten Ally*’s publication truly comes at the right time - not only to remind Western readers not to forget this part of history, but also to remind Chinese readers how diverse and complex connotation included in it, while today much of the war’s impact is far from being seen.
In early 1944, the 10,600 American troops based in Kunming, Yunnan province, awaiting combat against the Japanese, were consuming so much beef that, in the words of Yunnan governor Long Yun, “The oxen that plough the fields have all been bought up” (340). Even Chiang Kai-shek’s personal plea to increase the supply of beef could not alter the contradiction between the need for draft animals to till the fields and the voracious appetites of the Americans. The anecdote provides a revealing glimpse into one aspect of the Chinese side of World War II that in the West is usually told from American or British perspectives.

Rana Mitter’s history of China’s eight-year war of resistance to Japanese aggression is studded with interesting tidbits of information. There are vivid descriptions of the sights and smells of wartime Chinese cities, especially Shanghai and Chongqing, of the personal traumas of soldiers and civilians. Mitter makes extensive use of the diaries of Chiang Kai-shek and Zhou Fohai, a leading official in Wang Jingwei’s collaborationist government in Nanjing, as well as published sources and archival documents in Chinese and English by Chinese journalists, refugees, and foreigners in wartime China. There are accounts of battles, descriptions of refugee relief schemes, the great Henan famine, foreign diplomacy, and much else. In short, there is much to commend to readers in this fluent and often powerfully written account.

Nevertheless, this is a deeply flawed book that ultimately fails to achieve its perhaps overly ambitious objective of providing an authoritative history of a fragmented China at war. The three main fragments, of course, were the Chongqing-based Nationalist Government headed by Chiang Kai-shek, the Yan’an-based Communist state-within-a state headed by Mao Zedong, and the collaborationist Reorganized Government in Nanjing nominally headed by Wang Jingwei, an erstwhile comrade-in-arms of Sun Yat-sen, who defected to the Japanese side in December 1938. Unfortunately, instead of a coherent analytic narrative, Mitter presents a set of loosely connected chapters in a book that might better be titled “Sketches toward a History of China in World War II.” The transitions between and even within chapters from one topic to another are often weak, and are sometimes merely ellipses.

Mitter assays a comprehensive approach to the war that combines political, social, diplomatic, and military history. This is certainly one of its strengths. The book makes no pretense of being a military history and should not be judged as such, yet in a book about war one may reasonably expect some sustained treatment of strategy, tactics, logistics, intelligence, weaponry, and other aspects of warfare. What Mitter writes about the actual fighting tends to be superficial and episodic. One looks in vain for even a single map indicating the dynamics of such an important campaign as Japan’s 1944 Ichigo offensive that nearly knocked Nationalist China out of the war. The communists’ limited, mostly guerrilla warfare is scanted and the military activities of the various collaborationist regimes are passed over in silence.
Mitter’s tripartite approach is extremely uneven in its treatment of the three major contenders for power in wartime China. Much more space is devoted to Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists than to Mao and the communists or Wang Jingwei and the collaborationists, yet the inner dynamics of Chiang’s government are unexplored though we are given frequent insights into Chiang’s own state of mind courtesy of his diaries. With regard to the communists, Mitter focuses almost exclusively on Yan’an and the Shen-Gan-Ning so-called liberated area to the exclusion of all the other Communist-controlled zones in north China. He notes, but fails to explain, the enormous growth of the Communist party and the Communist armies during the war, subjects well-explained in the scholarly literature. With regard to the collaborationists, he devotes considerable space to how and why Wang Jingwei and Zhou Fohai jumped ship from the Nationalist side, but has very little to say about how the Reorganized Government in Nanjing actually functioned. The narrative often seems driven by the availability of a particular source, e.g. Zhou Fohai’s diary, rather by the intrinsic importance of a subject. This is expressed in a penchant for trivialities such as Mitter’s detailed account of the flight from Wuxi by boat and rail of Mrs. Yang, a wealthy Chinese Christian refugee, whilst millions of poor refugees trudged on foot to the interior hinterlands.

The tripartite approach clashes with one of Mitter’s main themes, namely, the purported unifying effect of the war on Chinese national consciousness and the growth of state power during the war, a development that supposedly prefigured the post-1949 communist dictatorship in which the state not merely dominated but nearly destroyed society. The much more complex reality of wartime China than that presented in Forgotten Ally is well-described and analyzed in China at War: Regions of China, a compendium of mostly first-rate conference papers by a stellar cast of Chinese, American, and Japanese scholars, a work to which Mitter makes no reference and which fails to appear in his suggestions for further reading. Another striking no-show is virtually any discussion of wartime culture, literature, and education.

Part IV, The Poisoned Alliance, by far the longest section of the book, intermingles chapters on domestic developments, including famine and repression, with others on China’s relations with its foreign allies, notably the United States. Mitter provides an almost blow-by-blow account of the oft-told tale of Chiang Kai-shek’s feud with the colorful, irascible, and culturally insensitive Lieutenant-General Joseph W. “Vinegar Joe” Stilwell, whose hagiographical portrait by Barbara Tuchman has long since been discredited by, among others, Jay Taylor, Chiang Kai-shek’s leading biographer. Mitter’s assessment of Stilwell as a self-aggrandizing megalomaniac with dubious strategic judgment is right on the mark. The Stilwell-Chiang cacophonous duet always makes for good reading, but it distracts from

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1 Stephen MacKinnon, Diana Lary, and Ezra Vogel, eds., China at War: Regions of China (Stanford University Press, 2007).

the larger picture of China’s troubled partnership with its wartime allies. He remarks correctly that “overall neither the British nor the Americans treated China as a true equal, nor China as a theater of primary importance” (244). True enough, but then in military terms China hardly was a true equal notwithstanding its heroic and mostly lonely resistance to Japanese aggression. Incidentally, Mitter fails to take notice of or incorporate the findings of Franco David Macri’s fine monograph *Clash of Empires in South China: The Allied Nations Proxy War with Japan, 1935-1941* that details Britain’s significant assistance to China via Hong Kong prior to its capture by the Japanese3. China was not so much a forgotten ally as an ally that was mistrusted, condescended to, under-supplied, and disdained. Only nominally a great power, China was a survivor, not a victor in World War II.

Mitter’s three chapters in Part 1, The Path to War, that provide the historical background to his subject read like lectures in an undergraduate course on modern Chinese history. Moreover, they contain errors that should not have appeared. A sampling includes the misstatement that Leon Trotsky was the Foreign Minister of Soviet Russia (he was actually the Commissar of War), that Chiang Kai-shek was a youth when he visited Soviet Russia in 1923 (he was actually thirty-six), that Mao’s famous 1927 work was “A Report of the Peasant Situation in Hunan” (it was actually titled “Report of an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan), that Manchuria was the northeastern province of China (actually the region comprised several provinces), that Joseph Stalin’s purge of Red Army officers antedated the Xi’an Incident (actually it came after), that the Long March commenced in June 1934 (actually it began in October), and that Mikhail Borodin was a Soviet agent sent to train Nationalist officers at the Whampoa Academy (actually he was a political adviser). To be sure, these are mere mosquito bites, not scorpion stings, but irritating nonetheless.

In sum, although this book is indeed a useful and thought-provoking contribution to the literature on China’s war with Japan, it is by no means the first to address this subject nor does it fill an immense historical void of ignorance, as the author intimates in his Prologue (9-12).

Upon seeing the title of Rana Mitter’s recent book: Forgotten Ally: China’s World War II, 1937-1945, as a Chinese historian, my heart started to beat and I couldn’t wait to read it. Finally, people have begun to pay attention to China’s role during WWII and seriously talk about China’s contribution to the cause of the allied fighting against Japan during the Second World War. Initially, I thought the book would be a pretty dry one as its focus is wartime China and therefore on the military, diplomatic, and political areas. To my surprise, however, the book is very readable, interesting, and has an impressive narrative flow. With his masterful skill and impressive and comprehensive knowledge of modern Chinese history, modern Japanese history, and Indian history, Mitter is able to weave the details of events, battles, and diplomatic activity with personal lives, either that of a miserable refugee or a normal foot soldier or a generalissimo, together with specific wartime sceneries into a vivid grandiose portrayal within the broad historical context. In most cases, Mitter exhausted his search for materials in all kinds of sources and has collected a variety of information, either personal diaries/memoirs, newspaper articles, or archival documents, which have enormously enhanced the content and credibility of this book.

More importantly, the book is not just telling stories; its narration is based on a clear awareness of all the controversial issues related to wartime China and thereafter as well as an impressive command and application of source materials for making its argument. It touches many critical but not well-informed historical ‘secrets,’ as well as almost every issue under dispute. For instance, Mitter reveals that the agreement for a second united front between the Kuomintang (KMT or the Nationalists) and the CCP (the Chinese Communist Party) was already reached before Zhang Xueliang, a Manchurian warlord, kidnapped Chiang Kai-shek, the leader of KMT and the Nationalist government in Xian on December 12, 1936 in order to force Chiang to form a united front with the CCP. (72-73) Mitter also points out that Japan was not fully prepared for a final showdown with China over the Marco Polo Bridge Incident when Japanese troops and KMT forces clashed, and Japanese leaders were divided by the issue of whether Japan should launch a full-scale war against China around July 7, 1937. (85, 184) Mitter fully expresses his view about the most controversial figures of Wang Jingwei, who served as head of a Japanese puppet regime in Nanjing after 1937, and Zhou Fohai, who assisted Jingwei. He uses many details from Zhou Fohai’s diary to show that they were actually patriotic and collaborated with the Japanese because of their belief that collaboration was the only way to save China and the suffering Chinese people. (67, 86-87, 95, 104-106, 197-200, 205-210, 287-289)

One of the main features of the book is its conspicuous defense of Chiang Kai-shek’s wartime policies and decisions. To great extent, the reader gets the feeling that Mitter writes about ‘the Forgotten Wartime Efforts by Chiang and the Nationalists’ rather than “the Forgotten Ally”, though the former is equally important and indeed has been forgotten by the West as well as mainland China. Yet, because of this, Mitter’s writing becomes more provocative. For instance, when talking about the critical decisions made by Chiang on breaking the bank of the Yellow River, giving up the defense of Nanking, the recall of Joseph Stilwell, the U.S. Army four star general and the Chief of Staff to Chiang Kai-shek, etc., Mitter
always uses his 'Chiang Approach' to put himself in Chiang's shoes to look at the situation and defend Chiang's reasoning and choices in a subtle way. Mitter often uses words from Chiang's diary to justify Chiang's decisions in situations that offered no alternatives. Yet, Mitter does not offer any explanation on why Chiang did not send out any notice to the villages and people living nearby the Yellow River for evacuation before ordering his subordinate to prepare for blowing up the bank of the Yellow River. Neither does he fully explain why Chiang changed his mind and suddenly gave up Nanking in the last minute. It seems that Mitter agrees with Chiang that the battle for Changsha was more important than the one in Burma, but he ignores the fact that the survival of Chongqing and the Chiang regime was much dependent on the Burma Road and the rationale behind Stilwell’s demand to retake Burma, from where the Japanese force could have taken southwest China and therefore Chongqing, not to mention that the United States was then hoping to use the military base in southwest China for its final offense against Japan before its success in applying the island-hopping strategy on the Pacific Ocean. Mitter argues that Chiang sacrificed many of his best troops in defending Shanghai, in the Taierzhuang battle and in Burma so that he was not able to win the battle at Changsha, but he does not mention that Chiang consistently reserved around 400,000 solders of his best army to surround the Communist troops in Shaanxi.

Similarly, Mitter ignores the fact that Mao Tze-dung, the leader of the CCP once expressed his interest in visiting Washington D.C. to the members of 'Dixie Mission', and brushes off the possibility that Mao might have had a sincere interest in developing a good relationship with the U.S. Finally, Mitter argues that Chiang's failure in his battle against the CCP mainly resulted from the fact that Chiang’s regime had been fighting with Japan alone for too long, without any significant international support to his cause, but is offered without any substantial evidence. In response to this argument, one would naturally ask: since the CCP even got less international support and less financial and military preparation from the prewar time, why could the CCP expand its military power and personnel dramatically during the wartime? Was there any wrongdoing or mistakes committed by Chiang? In all these cases, Mitter heavily relies upon Chiang Kai-shek's and Zhou Fohai's diaries, but how truthful their writings are is questionable. In analyzing the victory of the CCP and the failure of the KMT, one can’t make a creditable conclusion without engaging in a study of the broad social history, political history and economic history of the time. Likewise, when discussing the Nanking Massacre, although Mitter concludes that the massacre must have happened, regardless of how many civilians were killed, he avoids engaging in discussing the exact numbers and pointing figures at Japanese military leaders. Rather, he points to the general factors that led to the atrocity, such as anger, lack of liberal spirit in Japan, etc., all of which comes from secondary source material. When Mitter concludes that “There was nothing inevitable about the Chinese Communist Party’s coming to power in 1949” and it’s the war launched by Japan on China gave the CCP the change for survival and success, (377), he is right. However, the argument does not just stop there. The war gave both the KMT and the CCP the challenge and the opportunity for success. Mitter should have analyzed and compared the military and political policies of both the KMT and the CCP within the social and historical context, and asked the salient question: why did the KMT fail and the CCP succeed and what are the factors that caused these results? That is something that cannot be done only by citing the words from diaries and statements. It often happens that the weakness of a book comes along with its strengths. Since the
author of this book deals with so many controversial issues at the same time, he was not able to draw conclusions entirely derived from his own first-hand, in-depth and independent research. Instead, it seems that the opinions in the book, regarding many issues, especially about the three most important figures of the wartime China—Chiang Kai-shek, Mao Zedong and Wang Jingwei, are mainly based on reading in the secondary sources, and that evidence from primary sources followed. There is, however, no doubt that the virtues of this book far surpass its weaknesses, and in fact the two cannot be separated as it is impossible to write one book that touches on almost all the controversial issues related to the subject and pleases all readers. Actually, to raise these controversial issues is more important than to make the right judgments since the later really depends on one’s stand and perspective. To successfully raise the awareness of these controversies among scholars and readers and to force them to confront these controversies is a great achievement of the book. Without facing historical controversies, history and history study will be meaningless and lack interest.
First, I would like to express my gratitude to all three reviewers for taking the time and trouble to review the book. We are all over-burdened and I do not underestimate the effort needed to read and then critique a lengthy piece of work.

First, let me turn to Niu Jun’s lengthy, thoughtful, and generous review. It was particularly useful since it brought to the fore an issue that must necessarily concern any western scholar of Chinese history – how will one’s work be received in the academy in China itself, the country with which the topic is most intimately concerned. So I am glad to hear that the book, broadly speaking, seems to fit in with the historiographical conversation going on not just in the west but in China as well.

I was also pleased to know that the broad outlines of the book appear plausible and appropriately argued, and that the book is judged a useful contribution to the literature on this topic. I recognize also that Niu also raises some important points for debate, and I respond to the major issues here.

The first point is the question of just how important the War of Resistance was, in the end, to the wider trajectory of Chinese history. Niu makes the valid point that the Cold War intervened almost immediately afterward, and that the effect of the war with Japan was not as great as I have implied. However, I would suggest that the way that the Cold War emerged in Asia was in large part a product of the way that the war against Japan ended so suddenly, preventing a carefully thought-through regional architecture from emerging. The post-1945 Asian environment was planned by both the U.S. and USSR in the expectation that there would be a Nationalist Chinese government, perhaps in coalition with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The reasoning, particularly by the U.S., was that China’s wartime contributions earned it the right to some sort of say in the fashioning of a post-war Asian order. While it took only four years for that assumption to be overturned, its consequences would be long lasting. Today, China is once again turning to the memory of events such as the 1943 Cairo Conference in its arguments over regional territorial disputes. This is a sign, I think, that the Cold War froze some of the consequences of the war against Japan, but did not erase them. I think Niu is quite right in suggesting that we need to re-examine the Civil-War era. While that topic lies outside the scope of Forgotten Ally, I agree entirely that the paradoxes of those years, where vicious conflict happened in the context of a highly protean early Cold-War world where the international community was re-forming in unprecedented ways, needs further examination.

Niu makes another important point that is also mentioned by George Wei in his generous and well-argued review: that the book concentrates overly on an analysis that uses Nationalist (Guomindang) material. I agree that there is a concentration on the Nationalist side, and in particular the decisions of National leader Chiang Kai-shek, but I would argue that there is some logic in this emphasis. At the time, the Nationalists were the recognized government of China. It was the Nationalists, not the CCP, with whom the world negotiated. It was Chiang whom the Japanese wished to bring over to their side (and it was Chiang
whom Stalin supported with air power in the desperate first months of the war, even as Chinese CCP leader Mao Zedong and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin’s relationship became ever closer). Of course the Communists were a deeply important part of the resistance (and I have argued very specifically in the book against the idea, which was widespread in Taiwan in the high Cold War and is sometimes heard even now, that the Nationalists did all the fighting and the Communists simply waited for the war to end). I also spend considerable time on the collaborators simply because at one time it looked at least plausible that they might be the future, not Chiang or Mao.

However, in the end, the overall trajectory of the war, and the understanding of its significance, depends on the following question: how far could the internationally-recognized government of China, the Nationalist government, maintain its military and political capacity in the face of an onslaught by a better-armed, better-trained enemy? When the Japanese fought, they fought the Nationalists first and foremost: they bombed Chongqing much more frequently than Yan’an, they fought set-piece battles with Nationalist troops much more than with the CCP, and they sought peace deals primarily with Chiang, not with Mao. It seems to me reasonable, therefore, that that Nationalist-oriented thread of the narrative and analysis will be somewhat more prominent in any overall account of the war. However, both Niu and Wei are quite correct to point out that the question of CCP success is also crucial to the story of the war (along with Nationalist failure). I would suggest that for some two or three decades, the concentration in the field has been much more on the CCP (notably the arguments over whether the growth of Communist power came from nationalism, land reform, or other causes), and that a certain amount of rebalancing is worthwhile. But I take the reviewers’ point that one should not obscure one important argument by too much concentration on another.

Now to Steven Levine’s points. I am grateful for his comment that the book is a useful contribution to the topic. However, he also raises a variety of objections to the book. I have read his criticism carefully but can not help thinking that in the end, the majority of his points reflect his own personal preferences in a variety of areas, and a sense that ‘If I’d written this book, I’d have done it differently.’ A large part of his criticism centres on his dislike for the organization of the book. I would simply note that Wei’s review in this roundtable is kind enough to say “the book is very readable, interesting, and has an impressive narrative flow.” Most other reviews of the book have appreciated what they seem to find a clear prose style and logical organization.

Levine takes me to task for criticizing the West’s refusal to treat China as an equal. He notes: “True enough, but then in military terms China hardly was a true equal notwithstanding its heroic and mostly lonely resistance to Japanese aggression... China was not so much a forgotten ally as an ally that was mistrusted, condescended to, under-supplied, and disdained. Only nominally a great power, China was a survivor, not a victor in World War II.” Levine’s words could have been written – and in some form, have been – by a variety of western politicians and historians in every decade since 1945. But in the early twenty-first century, this approach just won’t do any more.
To make my point more clearly, let us ask the key question: what defined the major Allies in the Second World War? Above all, the ability to make decisions and strategic choices that would change the path of the war. Clearly the advanced industrial empires (Britain explicitly an empire, the U.S. and USSR in practice) were able to change the path of the war and defeat the Axis, although of course not without each other’s assistance. So can we argue that China was able to make decisions or choices that would put it in that category?

The arguments against this position are the more obvious, and it is on those that Levine draws in making his objection. I would agree that, for instance, China did not fight extensively outside its own (massive) borders; it did not provide significant financial assistance to other countries along the lines of the U.S.; and by the end of the war, the state of the country was desperate in the extreme and its system of government was falling apart (as the book makes very clear).

Even the points above, however, cannot be conceded in whole measure: fighting within the territory one of the largest countries in the world was hardly trivial, and China did in the end contribute to two Burma campaigns, somewhat in the face of its own interests. But let us move to the most important issue in this regard: to consider what would have happened if China had not taken certain key decisions at points where it had a genuine choice. In 1938, many western observers (such as the British diplomats chronicled in the book) confidently expected that China’s resistance would collapse. Had that happened, the consequences would have been extremely serious (and it was one of the reasons, after all, for Soviet assistance to the virulently anti-Communist Chiang Kai-shek). A Japanese-dominated China would most likely have become a weak satellite, ruled by a collaborationist government. This could have provided a launch pad for an attack on the USSR, or at the least a consolidation of East Asia as a Japanese-dominated sphere of influence for a generation to come. The Japanese had expected to conquer China in three months. Four years after the Marco Polo Bridge incident of 1937, they were still there, stuck in a stalemate that involved the commitment of hundreds of thousands of troops. That continued Chinese resistance allowed time for leadership and public opinion in the U.S. and Britain to change, and made an alliance that would make a global war possible. (Consider the alternative: what kind of alliance could the West have made with a Japanese-oriented China in 1938?) Levine is critical of the book’s level of concentration on Chiang himself at the expense of other figures in the leadership, but one should remember that one of the reasons why Stalin was so concerned at the 1936 Xi’an incident was the prospect of Chiang specifically being removed and China becoming a Japanese vassal. Can one imagine an alternative Nationalist leader - He Yingqin or even Wang Jingwei - being as determined to resist Japan at all odds? Personalities are not all, but they are not irrelevant either.

Levine notes that in ‘military’ terms China was not an equal ally. Well, no – nor do I claim it should be considered as one. How could it have been – an impoverished, disorganized state under siege from all sides? But one of the points the book makes was that China’s importance was also that it was the first non-western power to be given any kind of elevated standing as a wartime ally in a world still dominated by colonialism. Colonialism mattered, and so did China’s role in shaping the wartime message of anti-imperialism. It was no coincidence that Chiang and Jawaharlal Nehru of India were friends, nor that shortly after
the formation of the alliance with the west, Chiang made it a top priority – a political choice - to visit India to try and persuade the Congress leaders to join the war effort. Looking at China’s significance as an Ally purely in terms of its military commitments, as opposed to combining its real but secondary military value (holding down over half a million Japanese troops) with its wider suasive and symbolic power, was a miscalculation (by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, not least) even as early as 1942, and a misunderstanding of China’s wider role. It is an even more old-fashioned view to put forward in 2015.

Incidentally, I was interested to note Levine’s statement that China was a “survivor not a victor” since he was ,with James Hsiung, co-editor of a really very decent 1992 volume of essays entitled China’s Bitter Victory: The War with Japan, 1937-1945.1 Correctly, Levine states that the book does not purport to be a military history, though he objects to the lack of strategic description. For some readers, particularly those who want a blow-by-blow account of various battles, I agree that the book may not suffice (though the notes and reading guide would point them to plenty of other volumes that are). However, the aim of the book is to integrate different aspects of the war in one analysis, with political and social history being particularly strongly represented. Over-emphasis on one element risks stressing one factor to the exclusion of others, making an overall interpretation hard to obtain. I would also note that one of the works Levine suggests that I have not cited, the important volume by MacKinnon et al, China at War, is indeed cited at p. 393, footnote 12.

To continue with the theme of social history; one of the oddest criticisms Levine makes is of “trivialities such as Mitter’s detailed account of the flight from Wuxi by boat and rail of Mrs. Yang, a wealthy Chinese Christian refugee, whilst millions of poor refugees trudged on foot to the interior hinterlands.” For those who have not read the section of the book concerned (109-111), I should point out that Mrs. Yang, the refugee concerned, ran the danger of being robbed or raped, had to view endless dead bodies in the water as she fled up the Grand Canal from her home city of Wuxi, never sure if she herself might become the next of those corpses, saw parents violently separated from their children as they tried to board steamers, and had to travel for miles in a truck in which she and the other passengers were vomiting all over each other. Throughout, they found themselves unsure where they were going to live or what they were going to eat. Trivial?

As it happens, a significant proportion of the wartime refugee flight was indeed made up of the middle class precisely because they had more resources and options than the impoverished classes who were forced to stay and live under Japanese occupation. But if working-class refugees are the real story, then I would refer the reader to the accounts of the flight upriver to Chongqing in 1938-40, or the breaking of the dams at Huayuankou in 1938, or the flight from the Henan famine in 1942, all of which are detailed in separate chapters in the book (and from a variety of sources).

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It is certainly true that one of the reasons I showcased Mrs. Yang’s experience is that as a middle-class person, she was better able to express her own experience in contemporary materials. It is not just in China that the middle classes leave the best-preserved records, though there are other ways to address the issue of subaltern histories, including oral history and reports from observers, both of which are also used extensively in the book. This leads to one of Levine’s other, rather puzzling criticisms – that “the narrative often seems driven by the availability of a particular source, e.g. Zhou Fohai’s diary, rather by the intrinsic importance of a subject.” This dichotomy is a real head-scratcher: using unavailable materials has a touch of Jorge Luis Borges about it, but is not that helpful as a suggestion for a working historian. And anyway, those “available” materials are wide-ranging in type and origin, as a glance at the footnotes will show. There are manuscript materials, published primary materials, archival materials, and oral history collections, among others. As for the specific case he gives: Zhou Fohai was one of the most important figures in Wang Jingwei’s government and his diary is hugely revealing of the mindset behind collaboration – it seems to me a major document the importance of which is self-evident.

Levine also criticizes the concentration on the Yan’an (ShaanGanNing) base area rather than the many other areas of Communist activity. I address this point when writing about the historiography on p. 422. “The concentration on Mao is understandable,” I note, “but runs the danger of ignoring important Communist activity outside Yan’an.” For that reason, I go on to reference some nine major monographs dealing with CCP activity in the wartime years. But it is necessary, in the end, to provide some sort of framework for analysis and concentrate on certain areas over others. It seems to me still fair to say that of all the Communist base areas, Mao’s is the one which ultimately had the greatest significance in terms of its political and social impact, and it was certainly the base area that was best-integrated as an area with its own system of governance. It also provides a necessary point of contrast with a Nationalist government and its collaborationist alter ego under Wang Jingwei. These were not the only areas of government in China at the time; one could spend more time on the North China regime installed by the Japanese in 1937-38, on Manchukuo; but these three, and their leaders, crystallize the dilemmas of nation-state formation that marked China during the war. I am well aware of the complexities; the book acknowledges and illuminates some of them, rather than taking refuge in the idea that they are too obscure for anyone but specialists steeped in the details to interpret.

Levine adds that there is not much about “arts and culture in wartime in the book.” I could add to this list: there is also not enough in the book about gender, environmental history, business history, or the history of emotion, all of which are important areas in the study of war. I could have made the book twice as long, to be sure, but I suspect that doubling the pagination would not necessarily double the readership. Books have to have a focus. The focus of this one is an integrated political and social history of China’s war with Japan.

Finally, Levine gives the book grudging praise but states that “it is by no means the first to address this subject nor does it fill an immense historical void of ignorance” as I “intimate.” I cannot help feeling that the word “intimate” is a way of admitting that I do not actually ever say either of those things. And most readers will understand that my point is a quite different one. I would never claim to be the first to address the topic – the evidence against
is the plethora of works I cite in the 37 pages of endnotes and the seven and a half pretty solid pages of ‘further reading’ at the back, in which I make my debt to existing scholarship very clear. However, I do think that the wartime years are relatively under-studied in the modern China field relative to their importance; those who work in this field may recognize my sense that it sometimes feels as if we have moved from the Republic before 1937 to the PRC after 1949 without spending much time on the very important years in between. In the wider field of modern history, and even more, in public consciousness, I would stick absolutely by what I’ve said in that prologue: “immense historical void” is Levine’s phrase, not mine, but I would certainly maintain that there is indeed a continued ignorance in the west of the wider story and implications of China’s experience in World War II. When names such as Taierzhuang or Changsha are as well-known in the west as El Alamein or Stalingrad, or when the bombing of Chongqing is as well-known as the London blitz, the situation will have changed. It seems to me a fact, not an opinion, that that is not where western historical awareness finds itself now.

Levine is quite right to point out some errors that have crept in, which I will certainly endeavour to correct in future editions. Nonetheless, his criticisms have not altered my conviction, stated in the text, that “this book has taken a new approach by examining China’s war against Japan as one continuous narrative combining the viewpoints of the Nationalists, the Communists, and the collaborators,” in a way that has not yet obviously appeared elsewhere in the Anglophone literature.

It has been a pleasure to engage in this debate with three learned reviewers. I have been fortunate in that the book has been widely reviewed, and interested readers may wish to search online for some of those reviews of the book (whether as Forgotten Ally or under its UK title of China’s War with Japan) to gauge further the nature of the debate to which it has sought to contribute. I wrote the book in the belief that China’s wartime experience was a subject that deserved much more discussion than it has had up to now, and I’m delighted that such discussion shows no sign of dying down.