

# Introduction

DIANA LARY

During the Second Sino-Japanese War, China was transformed from a minor player on the international scene into a member of the elite club of the Allied powers. China, present at the Cairo Conference of November 1943, became recognized as one of the Big Four. It became a founding member of the United Nations and one of the five Permanent Members of the UN Security Council. This elevation was in stark contrast to China's international standing before the war. For most of the early Republic (from 1912 on), China was not taken seriously as an international player. At the Versailles conference, China was treated so disdainfully by the victorious states in the First World War that its views on the disposal of German territorial holdings in China and their partial transfer to Japan were not taken into account. China's international status did not improve in the 1920s and 1930s; China was considered by foreign countries to be weak and disunited. The reunification of China in 1928 under the Guomindang (GMD) did little to raise China's international standing. Some of the Western embassies even remained in Beiping after the capital was moved to Nanjing in 1929 by the new Nationalist government. Until the mid-1930s, the diplomats preferred the sophisticated and pleasing life of the charming old capital to the raw new capital with its awful climate.

After 1937 and the Japanese invasion of China, the violence of the Japanese forces produced sympathy and moral support for China from Western countries, but China's appeals for international assistance in stemming Japanese aggression received only a limited response, mostly of a moral rather than material nature. Germany had provided help to China in training its armies in the 1930s but broke off relations with China in the spring of 1938. The Soviet Union was concerned about China, since part of the avowed Japanese war aim was directed against the Soviets, from Manchuria. The Soviets provided military aid to China, including a large number of airplanes and the pilots to fly them. Marshall Zhukov's victory over Japan at the Battle of Nomonhan in summer 1939 put an end to the fear of

a Japanese attack on the Soviet Union. Once the Second World War broke out in Europe in September 1939, China became important, especially to Britain and France with colonies on the borders of China, but at the same time, it became impossible for them to provide direct assistance. For the next two years, China faced the Japanese alone.

In late 1941, Japan attacked the United States. The world war that had started in Europe expanded into the Pacific. China became one of the major anti-fascist powers, thus gaining the equal status that it felt it had always deserved. China's participation on the Allied side was important. World War II could now be presented as a coalition of equals involving all countries opposed to German and Japanese aggression, rather than as a war of Asians against white imperialists, as Japan had been able to argue until Pearl Harbor.

Our book sees the war both as a period when much damage was inflicted on China, negating all the progress that had been made until then, and also as one in which China once again became a major presence on the world stage. During much of the Cold War, the rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States obscured the significance of that change. It is only now, when China has begun to prosper economically, that we can gain a clear bearing on the importance of wartime China's strenuous efforts to enhance its international presence during the war. Our collection of essays suggests that its origins, as far as China's international position is concerned, lie in the Sino-Japanese War.

The chapters in this book are a selection of papers presented at a conference held in Chongqing, China's wartime capital, in September 2009. The central focus of the book is China's relations with its allies in the war against Japan and with its neighbors. Our coverage starts from before the outbreak of all-out war in 1937. This choice of starting point takes the time span beyond what has been the norm for discussing China's wartime foreign relations, a focus almost exclusively on China's relations with the United States after Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Our focus is on open, public international relations and on some of the major individual leaders involved in the war. Many of the articles rely on government records. Fascinating as it would be, we do not go into the murky world of secret negotiations and intelligence operations. Though they were a real and important area of wartime international relations, they are hard to document reliably.

### *Three Themes*

During the conference a number of major themes emerged. We have organized the book along the lines of these themes, each of which seems to us

to have been a major factor in the rise in China's international status, both then and in more recent times.

THE DEATH KNELL OF THE OLD EMPIRES  
AND THE RISE OF CHINA

The first section of the book deals with the impact of Japanese expansionism on Western imperialism in Asia and on Western colonies. In the early years of the war, China received little help from countries that, however well-disposed toward it, did not feel able to give material aid in resisting Japan. As the war went on, and the future inability of Western countries to defend their Asian colonies against Japan became clear, China came to be seen as a key ally, the last friendly holdout in a war that threatened to destroy European influence throughout Asia. The threatened colonies stretched from Hong Kong through French Indochina, Cambodia, Malaya, Singapore, Indonesia, Burma, and as far west as India, the British bastion in Asia, which, until late in the war, seemed vulnerable to Japanese attack. The threat of Japanese expansion was recognized in Europe, but the ability to react to it was severely constrained by the impact of the war in Europe on the home countries. Marianne Bastid-Bruguier's chapter on French efforts to maintain a role in Asian politics and protect its colonial interests in Southeast Asia provides one illustration of the rapid decline of European influence. Rana Mitter's depiction of Britain's struggle to come to terms with the evaporation of its influence in East Asia forms another.

Nationalist sentiments in Asian countries in the 1920s and 1930s had been aimed against European, and particularly British, imperialism. The expansionist Japanese saw themselves as the destroyers of Western imperialism, and they justified their expansion in Asia in the name of establishing the Great East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere, which would bring to an end European imperialism. The war in East Asia did bring the decline of Western empires in Asia, sometimes suddenly as in the case of Britain and at other times more slowly as with France. The European powers never recouped their prewar empires. By the 1960s European imperialism was gone, not just from East Asia but also elsewhere in the continent—with the exception of a few tiny colonial territories such as Hong Kong, Macao, and Goa. Thus, an Asian order that had emerged in the wake of the 1838–1842 Opium War and which had held sway for nearly a century, having an impact on East Asia and China at all levels, came to an end in World War II.

China's confidence in dealing with its neighbors, including the colonial territories, grew during the war. China started to plan seriously to reestablish its historical position in Asia. Ironically, the rise in the international status of China came at a time when the government of China appeared

to be weak. After the Japanese occupation of northern and eastern China in 1937 and 1938, the area of China actually controlled by the Chinese government was dramatically reduced, to a large but poor and remote area of western China, governed from Chongqing, a city almost completely cut off from the rest of the world.

Chongqing's isolation changed the Chinese government's own view of China. The move to the west forced Chongqing to take greater notice of China's western borderlands and neighbors than the government had before. This involved working out where the borders of China actually were, and establishing the exact nature of its relationship with territories on the edge of the Chinese world. It became important to distinguish between sovereignty and suzerainty, an issue explored in Chang Jui-te's chapter on China's relations with Tibet, which of course remain a source of difficulty. Chongqing was keenly aware of the extent to which the war had destabilized traditional relations between China, its borderlands, and the neighboring states, and of the degree to which Japanese encouragement of "ethnic independence" was fostering irredentism among the peoples of China's periphery, including those of Mongolia, but also Xinjiang.

In terms of neighboring states, one of China's key relationships was with the Soviet Union, nominally friendly toward Chongqing. But the Soviet Union, as the leader of world Communism, was at the same time involved in a complex relationship with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in its remote capital at Yan'an. Its relationship with Moscow, channeled through the Communist International (Comintern), was dictated to a great extent by the twists and turns in the Soviet Union's relationship with Germany and Japan. Yang Kuisong analyzes CCP-Soviet relations in his chapter, "The Evolution of the Relationship between the Chinese Communist Party and the Comintern during the Sino-Japanese War," placing it in the contexts of the Soviet Union's wartime strategy and its alliance with the GMD.

In the world of wartime Chongqing, the relationship between China and the Allies became more intimate. The Western countries moved their embassies from Nanjing to Chongqing. The diplomats shared the miseries of the Chinese evacuees and lived through the same relentless Japanese bombing. Their reports from Chongqing, which spoke of the courage of the inhabitants under bombardment, kept the sympathy for China alive. Their descriptions of the heat, the noise, the smells, and the general discomfort of Chongqing gave the war in Asia a reality that reports from China had often lacked before.

The constellation of foreign representatives in Chongqing changed over time. Before Pearl Harbor there were a small number of official foreign representatives in Chongqing and a larger group of pro-China foreigners, including missionaries, academics, and journalists, from a number of dif-

ferent countries. After Pearl Harbor the number of foreigners in Chongqing grew, most of the incomers energetic and determined Americans who wanted to see the war won. Many of these men, most notably General Joseph Stilwell, made huge impacts. Diana Lary's chapter on Canada's relations with China draws attention to the impact of the war between China and less powerful countries that have not featured in "big history" but that are nonetheless worth examining to understand the changed nature of Chinese foreign relations brought about by the war.

#### NEGOTIATING ALLIANCES AND SOVEREIGNTY

China's wartime diplomacy was much more effective than would have been expected in the lead-up to the war, when China seemed almost bereft of active allies. Then its diplomats, though often skilled and personable, had been unable to make any inroads in the Western capitals. The League of Nations had declined to intervene on China's behalf and contain the Japanese occupation of Manchuria.

In 1937 there was a possibility that the outbreak of war could be prevented, or that the conflict could be kept below the threshold of formal war. In spite of expressions of disapproval of Japan's actions, unable to come to a common position and fearing the outbreak of war in Europe, European countries and the United States declined to intervene. Japan appeared to have got away with its occupation of China. Although the fighting was ferocious from the beginning, neither China nor Japan declared war. Although China would do so after Pearl Harbor, Japan never did so. Tsuchida Akio demonstrates that it was less the belief that such a declaration might trigger the activation of the United States' neutrality laws, which prevented the United States from providing assistance to any country at war, than domestic concerns that lay behind this situation.

Later in the war, the positions of the European states and the United States changed and polarized. Some became China's allies, others nominally its enemies. With the start of the European War in 1939, the Chinese government was able to link the war in Asia to the war in Europe, and to ally itself more closely with Britain, in the front line of fighting Nazi Germany. Chongqing was prescient and well-informed about the constantly shifting events in Europe. With Germany, Japan, and Italy joined together first by the Anti-Comintern Pact and then in the Axis, it was obvious that China's enemy was the enemy of those fighting the Germans and Italians, even though there was no formal British declaration of war on Japan until the end of 1941, after the attack on Pearl Harbor brought the United States into the war.

After Pearl Harbor, the dynamic in Chongqing between China and the Allies changed. The dominant foreign influence in Chongqing was now

the United States, and the extent of the American involvement was enormous. Resources, advice, and financial aid poured into Chongqing from the United States. In his contribution, Xiaoyuan Liu analyzes the deliberations of US strategists about China's frontier regions and minorities. These were driven by the aim of finding a new configuration for East Asia that might enhance the stability of the region. Chiang Kai-shek was the central figure in Chongqing's international relations. He cultivated personal relations with several of the other global leaders, notably Roosevelt and Stalin. He also had a clear sense of who the rising leaders of Asia were. He put considerable effort into developing relations with them and securing their support for a new postwar international position for China. Yang Tianshi describes Chiang Kai-shek's visit to India and his meetings with Nehru. Li Yuzhen examines Chiang's requests to Stalin for active Soviet participation in the war, arguing that although these failed, both countries nonetheless profited from the limited cooperation they were able to achieve, which, in turn, was of fundamental importance to shaping the pattern of international alliances as it took definite shape after the Pacific War.

Chiang's skills at playing (and manipulating) the game of personal relationships, here in the international arena, underlined his central involvement in international affairs. He became, during the war, one of the first Chinese leaders to be elevated to the highest level of international awareness. In part his success on the international stage was due to the critical role of his wife and translator, Madame Chiang Kai-shek (Song Meiling). Chiang's diplomatic skills are one aspect of the major reinterpretation of his role in modern Chinese history, now underway in academic circles in China and abroad.

Sovereignty was a key issue in all of China's relationships with its neighbors and allies. It shaped Chongqing's view not only of the wartime present but also of the postwar world. The fundamental concern was the future extent of China and the nature of the relations between the Chinese center and the border regions. The end of the war was seen in Chongqing to involve not only the defeat of Japan and the end of foreign imperialism in China but also the emergence of a more strongly consolidated China, with its borders clearly demarcated and its "lost territories" reincorporated into the nation. In this sense, the views of the Chongqing government on the territorial extent of China were close to those later adopted by the Communist government. Nishimura Shigeo demonstrates in his chapter, "Northeast China in Chongqing Politics: The Influence of 'Recover the Northeast' on Domestic and International Politics," how China's Northeast (Manchuria) became regarded as an indelible part of China. By 1945 the GMD had invested so much political capital in this conceptualization of China that it became impossible for them to give it up in the civil war that followed, which, militarily, might have been the wiser option.

We do not deal with the collaborationist government in Nanjing. Though Wang Jingwei's government maintained some foreign relations, those relations did not amount to autonomous foreign relations. They were with allies of Japan and with countries that had fallen under *de facto* Nazi control, such as Vichy France.

#### ENDING WAR

Ending war is at least as complicated and difficult as starting it, although historians have paid little attention to this aspect of warfare. The end of the war in Asia came suddenly. After eight grim years of war, victory brought great relief to China, but it also brought its own problems. Chongqing was suddenly faced with enormous tasks—the resumption of control over areas occupied by Japan, the reconstruction of the economy, and the containment of the CCP, which had grown much stronger during the war.

One of the first issues was dealing with the defeated Japanese. Here, given how the Japanese had behaved in China and the terrible vengeance wreaked the year before when the Soviet Union's armies moved westward into Germany, China behaved with surprising moderation. In her chapter "The Nationalist Government's Attitude toward Postwar Japan," Wu Sufeng demonstrates that Chiang Kai-shek's policy of "repaying aggression with kindness" derived from the GMD assessment of the new realities that they believed would emerge in postwar Asia and the global international context.

China had to deal with the old empires, which showed signs of wanting to recoup former positions. There was little China could do about the Soviet Union in Manchuria. Soviet forces entered Manchuria in the last week of the war, effectively taking back control of cities created by the Russians only half a century before and lost to the Japanese in 1905. Eventually, the Soviet armies withdrew of their own accord in 1946, having removed much of Manchuria's moveable industrial equipment and facilitated the Communists' entrance into the region. China also had to deal with France over Indochina and with Britain over Hong Kong. Above all, Chiang Kai-shek needed to keep the United States involved in China's future, not least because of the Communist threat. This complex repositioning took place in the context of the deepening Cold War. Complementing Bastid-Bruguier's chapter on the French attempt to maintain a role in Asian diplomacy before and during the war, Yang Weizhen reveals the internal contradictions in Chinese policy, involving the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Executive Yuan, local military commanders, and Long Yun, the governor of Yunnan Province, neighboring Vietnam. The result was that Chinese officials and officers entered Vietnam after the war to accept Japan's surrender but soon withdrew because of the need to cater to

France and the desire of China's Nationalist government to restrain local power holders.

The last chapter of the war did not come with the end of hostilities in 1945 but only with a peace treaty signed well into the Communist period. That treaty, ironically, was signed by a government that no longer had control over most of China but only of the island of Taiwan. The war had made China stronger internationally, but internally the war changed the balance of power; the Chinese Communists became strong enough to first challenge and then defeat the GMD government, in a civil war that started immediately after the Japanese surrender and that only came to an end four years later. Hans van de Ven shows that the treaty of peace between the Republic of China and Japan helped stabilize the political situation in East Asia, even though it was less a treaty of peace than an integral part of the United States' effort to create a pro-US Cold War front line in the region. The treaty recognition of China as one of the victors of World War II had ramifications that have lasted until today, and will do so for the foreseeable future. It also bequeathed to posterity a set of issues, including the status of Taiwan and Japan's war responsibility, which remain alive and might yet become destabilizing.