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## Reviews

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*China's War with Japan 1937–1945: The Struggle for Survival*, by Rana Mitter. London: Allen Lane, 2013. xxii+458 pp. £25.00 (cloth), £14.99 (eBook).

Written for the general public as well as for scholars, this is the first comprehensive English-language history of China's eight-year war with Japan. As the title of its American edition (*Forgotten Ally*) suggests, the book has a mission: to reinstate China to its rightful place in the history of World War II. While Diana Lary's *The Chinese People at War* (2010) is a condensed, classroom-ready text that takes a thoroughly Chinese view and omits much of the geopolitical context, Mitter's book repeatedly pans out from China and back again, creating a kaleidoscopic view of Chiang Kai-shek's China as one of the epicenters of a devastating global conflict.

Making use of a recently available source—Chiang Kai-shek's diary, which was opened to public access at Stanford University's Hoover Institution in 2006—Mitter follows the war's vicissitudes from inside the mind of the generalissimo. The result is an intimate portrayal of global events. For example, when Chiang met with Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill at the Cairo Conference in November 1943 (the first and last such meeting in which Chiang participated as a full equal), he recorded many positive things about the American president in his diary, but of the British prime minister he wrote that he "can't be compared with Roosevelt. He can be summed up as narrow-minded, slippery, selfish, and stubborn" (309). Mitter's recounting of the ongoing feud between Chiang and Joseph Stilwell, the US army general sent by Chief of Staff George C. Marshall to command American forces in the China-Burma-India Theater, also turns to personal details to enhance the story line while underscoring how much an individual's character flaws could influence larger historical events. In Mitter's telling, Stilwell's stubborn desire to beat the "Japs" without truly understanding his foe led to the unnecessary deaths of thousands of Chinese soldiers who twice followed him into the mosquito-infested jungles of Burma on a fool's errand.

The book is divided into four parts. Part I sets the stage by describing prewar tensions between China and Japan, the beginning of civil war between the Com-

munists and Nationalists (Guomindang), and tensions within the Nationalist Party, represented by the rivalry between Chiang Kai-shek and Wang Jingwei. Part II closely examines key wartime events, including the battle for Shanghai, the Nanjing Massacre, the unexpected and heartening victory at Taierzhuang, the deliberate breaching of the Yellow River dikes in June 1938 in a desperate attempt to save Wuhan, and the loss of Wuhan nonetheless in October 1938. Part III covers the “hunker down” years when China continued to fight alone. Air raids turned nearly every major city in Free China into rubble, and Wang Jingwei solved his problems with Chiang by collaborating with the Japanese and establishing a puppet regime in Nanjing. Part IV, titled “The Poisoned Alliance,” focuses on the years when other nations entered the war and China became one of the “Big Four” Allies. While not negating the scathing criticism that the Allied countries had for Chiang, Mitter carefully constructs each scene from both Chinese and Allied perspectives to show that Chiang Kai-shek repeatedly worked to gain respect and act with integrity in nearly impossible situations.

Mitter delivers military history at its best with a narrative that deftly balances international diplomacy, domestic politics, military exploits, and social trends in order to emphasize that the war’s influence extended far beyond the battlefield. Indeed, Mitter’s primary arguments, placed in the background so as not to deter the lay reader, all point to the war’s long-lasting effects on Chinese society and politics. While none of this will surprise a researcher in modern Chinese history, gathering the evidence together and weaving it into a narrative that underscores China’s major role in World War II forcefully shows just how much this global event shaped modern China and in turn how profoundly events in modern China influenced the world. He reminds us that the Communist Party came to its full strength during and because of guerrilla fighting against the Japanese and propaganda fights with the Nationalists, and that the Nationalist Party fatally lost public support during the trying war years, largely due to problems that worsened in the ensuing civil war (inflation, corruption in military and civilian leadership, and an ongoing campaign of terror against suspected leftists). Mitter also underscores the leadership roles that China took in the postwar world, precisely because it had become one of the Big Four Allies during the war. Moreover, he emphasizes that, though they took different paths, Chiang Kai-shek, Mao Zedong, and Wang Jingwei all had the same goal of creating “a modern, nationalist Chinese state” (377).

The book’s strengths are also its weaknesses. The focus on Chiang, Mao, and Wang as key figures in this epic drama will draw readers in, but it also follows the outdated “big man history” approach that transforms complex events into the machinations of individual masterminds. The book’s exhaustive detail may delight specialists but deter general readers who do not seek encyclopedic knowledge of every twist and turn. Mitter’s project of rescuing Chiang’s Nationalist government from the past half-century of condemnatory scholarship is a welcome

adjustment, but this goal occasionally clouds his judgment. One example is his sympathetic portrayal of an exhausted generalissimo who mostly ignored the Henan famine in the spring of 1943 that killed nearly 4 million people (271–73). Though Mitter makes the important and too often overlooked point that the famine partly resulted from grain taxation policies that were necessary to feed the Nationalist Army, letting Chiang off the hook for this disaster swings the pendulum too far in the other direction.

Most of the English-language works on the War of Resistance examine particular locales or events or are collections of scholarly essays that dive deeply into specifics. Putting all of this work together into one exhaustively detailed and panoramic book, Mitter offers our era a definitive history of the war.

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*Negotiating China's Destiny in World War II*, edited by Hans van de Ven, Diana Lary, and Stephen R. MacKinnon. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015. xii+319 pp. US\$60.00 (cloth).

This is a welcome volume. It has long been apparent that China's reemergence as a great power began during World War II. Yet, strangely, there is no comprehensive study of that reemergence, which the title of this volume promises. Unfortunately, a large number of aspects of China's reemergence as a great power are not covered. These include the activities of able representatives such as Hu Shih in winning US sympathy after July 1937, stiffening the US spine to confront Japan in 1940–41, and playing on Roosevelt's vision of China after Pearl Harbor as the policeman of post-Japanese empire East Asia; the role of China's war of resistance in the Anglo-American "Europe First" strategy; and Chiang Kai-shek's use of threats of defection via "collapse" as leverage with Washington; the role of Soviet and American military assistance in China's wartime military development, including China's two Burma campaigns of 1942 and 1945; the renegotiation of the "unequal treaties"; uprooting the Soviet hold on Xinjiang; China's entry first into the Big Four and then the UN Security Council as a permanent member; China's prescribed role in the Allies' offensive strategy in Asia; the devastating blow to Chinese aspirations embodied in the Yalta arrangements; and, related to all of the above, nationalist competition between the KMT and the Communist Party.

Rather than discussing such weighty topics, *Negotiating China's Destiny* deals with France's desperate search for a strong patron who would support continuing French sovereignty over Indochina; Britain's gradual realization it would not