

# A partnership for disorder

China, the United States, and their policies for  
the postwar disposition of the Japanese Empire,

1941-1945

XIAOYUAN LIU

*Potsdam College of the State University of New York*



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# Introduction

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The Asian–Pacific dimension of World War II is an extremely complicated and significant aspect in the international history of this century. This is so not only because the Asian–Pacific conflict encompassed the largest geographic theater of the war, but also because the war fought against Imperial Japan involved forces that combined political, racial, ideological, and cultural differences. If one can liken the military dimension of the war to a two-sided chess game, on the political–diplomatic front the belligerents were playing a Chinese checker game that almost continuously redivided them into many sides. This study examines one aspect of the wartime American–Chinese relationship that has been largely overlooked by the existing historiography of World War II: the American and Chinese governments’ wartime cooperation in conceiving of a new international order for postwar East Asia. Focusing on this one subject, the study cannot avoid being cursory on certain other important issues regarding the Asian dimension of World War II.

By tracing those paths in which the American and Chinese war and peace aims for East Asia were constructed and then exploring the two governments’ efforts to coordinate their postwar programs, this inquiry bears some resemblance to three groups of scholarly works pertinent to the international relations of World War II. The first is the literature on the wartime inter-Allied diplomacy for reorganizing peace. In these studies, China’s role is usually minute. Since China was the only Asian member of the so-called Big Four in the United Nations coalition, the exclusion of China by these studies from the inter-Allied consultation for the postwar settlement is a noteworthy omission. This omission has created an impression that in World War II, Asian peoples were largely passive spectators of the diplomatic maneuvering among the Anglo–American–Soviet powers.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to list here all the important studies of inter-Allied diplomacy, but my point can be verified by the *Guide to American Foreign Relations since 1700* (Santa Barbara, CA:

Considering the fact that in World War I Japan had participated in the secret diplomacy among the allied powers only for the purpose of taking advantage of China's weakness, one wonders whether World War II saw an even less active and accountable Asia in international politics than did the earlier world war.

This study offers a different picture. Without question, China was the weakest among the Big Four, and its foreign policy initiatives more often foundered than succeeded. But it is also true that the war years saw an unprecedented activism in Chinese diplomacy. This activism was reflected not only in the Chinese government's routine diplomatic activities but also in its part in important consultations taking place at the highest level in association with the Allied governments. Although China's dire military situation mandated Chongqing's frantic search for assistance from the Western Allies, this was not the only concern of China's wartime diplomacy. The Chinese government also participated in the inter-Allied maneuvering for organizing peace and was resolved not to be excluded from the process, especially where Asia was concerned. The two-way personal diplomacy between Chiang Kai-shek and President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Chinese government's participation in international conferences bearing on issues of the postwar world, and Kuomintang (KMT, or the National People's Party) leaders' often erratic bargaining with the Americans at Cairo in 1943 and then with the Russians at Moscow in 1945 all indicated significant escalations of China's importance in international politics. Until the Asian war of 1937-1945, foreign powers never accepted China as a worthy participant in important diplomatic undertakings.

The second category of scholarship that facilitated this inquiry includes studies concerning wartime American-Chinese relations. During the past forty years, steady scholarly interest in the wartime encounters between the United States and China has produced many important works. In the process, a conventional approach to investigation, which I call the "American-in-China approach," has been perfected. Typically, many books in this area include "in China" in their titles. This approach usually depicts the wartime American-Chinese relationship as a shabby structure at the beginning that was eventually torn apart by its own built-in time bombs, such as incoordinate military strategies, disputes over American aid to China, mutual misgivings about reforms in China, diverging orientations on the Chinese Communists, and feuds between personalities. In this picture, what has been left out or only sketched in passing is the American-Chinese relations over issues *external* to China. Although principal research interests have sought to analyze America's foreign policy in China, in these studies China's domestic conditions have received far more attention than

its foreign policies.<sup>2</sup> The America in China approach to the study of wartime American–Chinese relations and the “China exclusion” tendency in the study of inter-Allied diplomacy have had the same effect: both imply that during World War II, “China affairs” remained basically unchanged. Foreign powers might view China as a problem, an arena, a prize, a geographic name, or, at most, a lesser adjunct to their strategies in the power politics of the world, but not as a force in its own right in international relations.

A careful examination of the wartime American–Chinese relationship with regard to a peace settlement in Asia indicates that this old image of China affairs was no longer held by either American or Chinese policy-makers. That relationship itself affords a salient indication that during World War II the international politics of East Asia underwent a profound change. At the core of the revolution was China’s entry into world affairs with new credentials. These credentials arose partly from China’s own tenacious resistance against Japan and partly from Washington’s promotion. Once nationalism became a potent force behind China’s foreign policy in the early twentieth century, Chinese diplomacy was never again content to function only by adjusting to the prevailing international system as defined by the Western powers. But China’s chance to redefine its international posture came only during World War II at a time when China’s principal suppressor, Japan, was defeated and when China was brought into an alliance with the United States.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For instance, Herbert Feis, *The China Tangle: The American Effort in China from Pearl Harbor to the Marshall Mission* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953); Tang Tsou, *America’s Failure in China, 1941–1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963); Wilma Fairbank, *America’s Cultural Experiment in China, 1942–1949* (Washington, DC: G.P.O., 1976); Liang Jingdong, *General Stilwell in China, 1942–1944: The Full Story* (Jamaica, NY: St. John’s University Press, 1972); Michael Schaller, *The U.S. Crusade in China, 1938–1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); and Barbara W. Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911–1945* (New York: Macmillan, 1970). A noteworthy exception to the conventional line of inquiry is Kenneth E. Shewmaker, *Americans and Chinese Communists, 1927–1945: A Persuading Encounter* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971), which is about a nonofficial aspect of the wartime Sino–American relationship. Anthony Kubek’s *How the Far East Was Lost: American Policy and the Creation of Communist China, 1941–1949* (Chicago: Regnery, 1951); Joseph W. Esherick, ed., *Lost Chance in China: The World War II Despatches of John S. Service* (New York: Random House, 1974); and Dorothy Borg and Waldo Heinrichs, ed., *Uncertain Years: Chinese–American Relations, 1947–1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), are useful studies showing some of the ongoing debates in the field.

<sup>3</sup> Before dealing with Japan’s aggression, Chinese diplomacy in the 1920s had a broad agenda: to reform China’s foreign affairs. Akira Iriye’s *After Imperialism: The Search for a New Order in the Far East, 1921–1931* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965) offers a classic treatment of the subject. Edmund S. K. Fung’s *The Diplomacy of Imperial Retreat: Britain’s South China Policy, 1924–1931* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1991) and Zhang Yongjin’s *China in the International System, 1918–1920: The Middle Kingdom at the Periphery* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991) are two noteworthy new studies.

In the war years, to empower the new China state and restructure the international relations of East Asia, policymakers in Chongqing and Washington agreed that China should recover its lost territories from Japan, maintain a preeminent interest in Korea's postwar settlement, share the responsibility for postwar control of Japan, and participate in consultations among the world's leading powers. Yet, wartime American–Chinese cooperation in designing peace for Asia is easy to forget. The principal reason is that in the immediate postwar years, China's withdrawal into another civil war and Soviet Russia's ascendance in Asian politics prevented the Chinese government from participating effectively in Allied actions to restore peace in Asia. But these developments should not prevent us from observing the new vigor of Chinese nationalism driving toward substantial renovation of China's foreign affairs and the initiative in U.S. foreign policy for fostering its first Asian client state.

Here an explanation should be given with regard to the geographical range of this inquiry. The study examines closely American and Chinese policies on postwar settlement in Korea, Manchuria (to the Chinese, Dongbei or the Northeast), the Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, and Japan proper but only mentions in passing Japan's other imperial territories. The reason is that the latter group of territories had only marginal significance to the wartime American–Chinese relationship.<sup>4</sup> Territories in Southeast Asia are also not treated in detail. In the war years, despite Japan's occupation or indirect control over territories in this area, the American and Chinese governments continued to view them as European colonies and hence as part of the European problem. Although there are some valuable studies of wartime Anglo–American diplomacy surrounding these issues, a study of wartime American–Chinese encounters pertinent to Southeast Asia remains to be written. That subject deserves a separate treatment.<sup>5</sup>

My inquiry also benefits from a third category of scholarship that has

<sup>4</sup> For discussions of the conceptions of Japan's "formal" and "informal" empires, see Mark R. Peattie's introduction to Ramon H. Myers and Mark R. Peattie, ed., *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895–1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 3–52, and Peter Duus's introduction to Peter Duus et al., ed., *The Japanese Informal Empire in China, 1895–1937* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), xi–xxix.

<sup>5</sup> The best studies of the Anglo–American relationship over postwar settlement in Asia are Wm. Roger Louis, *Imperialism at Bay: The United States and the Decolonization of the British Empire, 1941–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), and Christopher Thorne, *Allies of a Kind: The United States, Britain, and the War Against Japan, 1941–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978). Also noteworthy is John Sbraga, *Anglo–American Relations and Colonialism in East Asia, 1941–1945* (New York: Garland, 1983). King C. Chen's *Vietnam and China, 1938–1954* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969) presents the problematic theory that during World War II the Chinese government did not have a policy toward Vietnam. This theme is continued in a recent study by Stein Tonnesson, *The Vietnamese Revolution of 1945: Roosevelt, Ho Chi Minh and de Gaulle in a World at War* (London: Sage Publications, 1992), 57.

helped recast an understanding of the Chinese foreign relations in the Republican period.<sup>6</sup> Students of Chinese diplomacy of this period cannot avoid confronting a question of immense importance: given China's fragmentary political condition at home and especially the existence of a vigorous Communist regime in Yan'an, to what extent can the official foreign policy of the KMT regime be interpreted as China's national foreign policy? Researchers who see continuity in the evolution of modern China's foreign policy and those who see aberrations and interruptions will likely have different answers. This study argues that the wartime foreign policies of the KMT and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) converged in important aspects. It points to continuity in China's international orientation between World War II and the ensuing periods. Important studies in both Chinese and Western languages of the CCP's foreign policy in World War II agree that the war years constituted a formative period for the CCP's international behavior. In other words, the foreign policy of the People's Republic of China had its origins in the caves of Yan'an.<sup>7</sup>

The coexistence of the KMT and the CCP regimes in wartime China, however, should not lead to a conclusion that in wartime China there were two or more partisan foreign policies but none that can be named as "national." It is undeniable that both the KMT and the CCP utilized foreign policy as an instrument in their struggle for power in China. Yet, a fundamental fact is that unlike Chinese warlords in the early 1920s, the KMT and the CCP were not struggling merely for *dipan* (territory) but mainly for *zhengquan* (state power). In the long run, their success or failure would have to rely on the extent to which their domestic and foreign policy programs were compatible with the prevailing national aspirations in China.

A prominent phenomenon in wartime China is that while upholding conflicting prescriptions for China's domestic problems, the KMT and the CCP embraced many of the same goals in China's foreign affairs. In the war years, the KMT's execution of China's foreign policy did not necessarily make the policy a partisan pet on all occasions and in all issues. As

<sup>6</sup> In terms of the genre of investigation, three works are particularly relevant to this study: William C. Kirby, *Germany and Republican China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1984); John W. Garver, *Chinese-Soviet Relations, 1937-1945: The Diplomacy of Chinese Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); and Youli Sun, *China and the Origins of the Pacific War, 1931-1941* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Garver, *Chinese-Soviet Relations*, 123-152, 237-270; James Reardon-Anderson, *Yenan and the Great Power: The Origins of Chinese Communist Foreign Policy, 1944-1946* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); Steven M. Goldstein, "The CCP's Foreign Policy of Opposition, 1937-1945," in James C. Hsung and Steven I. Levine, ed., *China's Bitter Victory: The War with Japan, 1937-1945* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1992), 107-129; Niu Jun, *Cong Yan'an Zouxiang Shijie-Zhongguo Gongchandang Duiwai Guanxi de Qiyuan* (Approach the World from Yan'an: The Origins of the Foreign Relations of the Chinese Communist Party) (Fuchou: Fujian Renmin Chubanshe, 1992).



a party in power, the KMT had to consider its foreign policy from the perspective of a national government, though from time to time it was also forced to choose between its partisan interests and the nation's broader interests. In fact, as Japan's aggression inflicted unprecedented crises on China, the popular will in China for national salvation and future development more than ever manifested itself in a clear and unanimous voice. To this will, both the KMT and the CCP felt obliged to subscribe. Therefore, although focusing on the KMT regime's foreign policy, which is inevitable due to the KMT's direct participation in the wartime diplomacy among the leading Allies, this study reveals not a mere partisan undertaking disguised as a national policy, but a foreign policy that, despite interference from partisan spirit, reflected a genuine national essence transcending the KMT-CCP conflict.

The comparative approach of this study is based on the conviction that by juxtaposing the stands of the United States and China on the same set of postwar issues in Asia, new insights can be brought to both the American and Chinese experiences. In his study *Power and Culture: The Japanese-American War, 1941-1945*, Akira Iriye views international relations as both power-level interactions and cultural-level interchanges. His finding about wartime Japanese-American relations is thought-provoking: although Japan and America were involved in a struggle for power, their views on a peaceful structure in postwar Asia were basically in agreement. The reason for this paradox, Iriye argues, is that "the two governments included leaders with a shared past who had once worked together for similar goals and in accordance with the same principles, but who had gone separate ways to experiment with alternative solutions to global and domestic problems."<sup>8</sup>

Iriye's two-level view of international politics can also be applied to the wartime American-Chinese relationship, which presents a different paradox. Namely, although the United States and China fought on the same side during the war, the two governments were driving toward different directions in their political schemes on the future of East Asia. When contemplating the same complex of subjects on postwar international relations in Asia, leaders of the two governments tended to encounter rather different problems with their foreign policies. Nor did they subscribe to the same set of principles when looking for solutions. China and the United States certainly did not have a shared past. Furthermore, unlike Japan and other counterparts of America's wartime diplomacy, China did not operate at the same power level as the United States. During the war years, even when Western and Chinese leaders managed to tailor a garment of legal

<sup>8</sup> Akira Iriye, *Power and Culture: The Japanese-American War, 1941-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), vii, 265.

equality for their relationship, they could not bridge the chasm created by the difference in power and status between China and the other leading Allied powers. Historical, cultural, and status differences existent in the wartime American–Chinese relationship tended to generate disagreements more enduring and profound than those caused by strategies, personalities, and political orientations. Briefly, Chinese officials often contemplated China’s postwar foreign relations with a spirit of absolute nationalism, an Asia-centered calculation, and a confrontational perception of international politics, whereas American leaders approached the issue of postwar international order from an inclusive and world-systemic view.

Therefore, although Japan was the enemy, in the long run China the partner posed a greater challenge to U.S. foreign policy. During World War II, the United States was on its way to becoming the hegemon of the world. But in Asia, Western influence was receding. To maintain the momentum of America’s leadership in Asian affairs, policymakers in Washington were compelled to seek new pivots for their Asian policy and to look for new partners. With its newly achieved yet confusing international identity – a great power without substance – China became associated closely with the United States. American leaders treated China as the representative of the emerging new Asia and at the same time ignored completely other Asian nationalist movements. In a sense, America’s ill-conceived encounter with China in the war years was responsible for the American government’s unpreparedness to cope with Asian nationalist movements after the war. In dealing with the Chinese government, American policymakers also often misconstrued Chongqing’s foreign policy intentions and underestimated the difficulty of enlisting the Chinese in America’s foreign policy agenda. The Chinese government established its war aims in Asia as absolute conditions for both achieving fundamental improvement in China’s international environment and winning popular support for its leadership in China. But leaders in Washington tended to view China’s new international role and solutions in Asian territories as building blocks that could be arranged in different ways to underpin a world peace system according to the American vision.

To Chinese diplomacy, the wartime partnership with the United States was transcendent but hazardous. The practice surpassed the ancient Chinese statecraft of “using barbarians to curb barbarians,” which since the mid-nineteenth century had been used repeatedly by Chinese rulers without effect. Also, unlike the Chinese government’s prewar cooperation with Germany and the Soviet Union, which were useful for China’s resistance against Japan but had no direct impact on the general conditions of China’s foreign affairs, China’s wartime partnership with the Western Allies marked the *lawful* (in contrast to Japan’s unilateralism) conclusion of the old relations between China and the treaty powers and, consequently,

promised to renovate drastically China's foreign affairs.<sup>9</sup> In other words, during the war years, the American alliance enabled Chinese foreign policy to shift from its single-minded anti-Japanese effort to a comprehensive program for enhancing China's international stature. Yet, although the KMT regime sought in earnest a long-term alliance with the United States, its officials were apprehensive about the price they would have to pay for relying on a Western power to solve their domestic and foreign policy problems. Like the South Korean and South Vietnamese regimes in the postwar years, the wartime Chinese government wanted in its American ally a generous patron, not a dictating superintendent, of its own policies. Among KMT officials, suspicions and bitterness toward the United States were accentuated when they discovered that America's postwar objectives in Asia were not congruent with theirs.

Eventually, American–Chinese cooperation in searching for peace culminated in failure. When World War II ended, a fragile configuration of international forces emerged in East Asia that consisted principally of stopgap compromises and improvised arrangements among China, the Soviet Union, and the United States. An effective American–Chinese partnership was not an element in the new status quo. Nor did the new status quo promise a lasting peace. Although the American–Chinese collaboration in war succeeded in crushing the Japanese Empire, in an American–Chinese–Soviet political triangular relationship for a postwar settlement in East Asia, the link between America and China proved weak and ineffectual. Indeed, although the main target of the American and Chinese foreign policy planning was the Japanese Empire, it was the Soviet Union that posed a more troublesome problem to the American–Chinese partnership. During the first half of the Pacific war, the official mind set in both Washington and Chongqing was focused on the historical job of dismantling the Japanese Empire. When the Soviet issue did emerge in their bilateral discussions, it was either evaded or postponed.

Although both the American and Chinese governments had concerns about Soviet intentions in the postwar years, each preferred a different approach. During the second half of the Pacific war, when the Soviet Union began to engage actively in inter-Allied discussions of postwar issues in Asia, the American–Chinese alliance based on their common interest for dealing with the Japanese Empire began to erode. In 1945, inter-Allied diplomacy became highly political and volatile. The two-stage diplomacy proceeding from Yalta to Moscow in that year, during which the Americans and Chinese negotiated with the Russians separately, offered only the most conspicuous indication of the bankruptcy of the American–Chinese partnership for peace. The ascendance of Soviet power in Northeast Asia

<sup>9</sup> See Kirby, *Germany and Republican China* and Garver, *Chinese–Soviet Relations* for Chinese–German and Chinese–Soviet cooperation in the 1930s.

at the very end of the war changed the whole context of American–Chinese foreign policy planning and rendered certain earlier plans irrelevant. Under the circumstances, then, leaders in the two countries improvised. As a result, in contrast to the negotiated balance of power in postwar Europe, in which the Big Three fully participated, the peace structure in East Asia was based on temporary arrangements and incomplete deals for which no collective responsibility ever existed. If the situation in postwar Europe was an “armed truce,” the postwar international relations in the Asian–Pacific region were even less organized and constituted but a disorder heading toward new wars.<sup>10</sup>

The narrative in this book generally follows the chronological order of events. Chapter 1 comments on some features of the wartime Sino–American alliance that had roots in the two countries’ prewar relations. Chapters 2 to 6 examine the two governments’ policy planning operations and their diplomatic maneuvers with regard to East Asian territories as of the Cairo Conference. Chapter 7 discusses the Chinese Communist leaders’ intentions in postwar East Asia in comparison with the KMT foreign policy. Chapters 8 and 9 trace the post-Cairo developments in Chongqing’s and Washington’s search for a peace settlement in East Asia, indicating signs of erosion in the Sino–American alliance. Chapters 10 and 11 shed light on the course and causes of the emergence of an American–Chinese–Soviet triangular relationship by the end of the Pacific war. And Chapter 12, the Epilogue, attempts to establish the relevance, or lack of relevance, of the wartime strategic planning of the Allied governments to postwar developments in East Asia.

<sup>10</sup> Hugh Thomas’s *Armed Truce: The Beginnings of the Cold War, 1945–1946* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), 11, quotes Dean Acheson’s and the Soviet diplomat Maxim Litvinov’s similar opinions, expressed during the initial months of the postwar period, that the Soviet–Western relationship in Europe was an armed truce.