1 Introduction

Toward a Grassroots History of Sino-US Relations

Zach Fredman and Judd C. Kinzley

Powerful geopolitical shifts occurred in Asia during the 1940s, as World War II (1937–45) and the Chinese Civil War (1946–49) that followed on its heels transformed power relations and set the wheels of the Cold War in motion. The United States played a central role in this transformation, as officials in Washington channeled vast quantities of material, economic, and political aid to Chiang Kai-sheks's Nationalist Party (Guomindang) government for its fight against Japan and later its struggle against Mao Zedong's Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The story of the wartime Sino-US relationship has long been narrated through the actions of a handful of Chinese and American political elites and senior military commanders. Yet, as the chapters in this volume make clear, the tectonic shifts brought about by the wars in China can be more clearly understood only when we turn our eyes downward to the sprawling cast of Chinese and American actors and the trans-Pacific wartime networks they forged.

The Sino-American alliance, which began tentatively in late 1938 but was officially affirmed on January 1, 1942, accelerated a deep engagement between Americans and Chinese that resonated from the halls of power right down to the grassroots. The establishment of the Sino-American wartime alliance was the beginning of the largest sustained engagement between Americans and Chinese that has ever taken place in China. This engagement ended abruptly in 1949 with the fall of the Nationalist Party government.

The more than 121,000 American servicemen deployed to China during the 1940s were joined by American scientists, engineers, businesspeople, adventurers, and activists, among many others.[1] Large numbers of Chinese citizens, including students, government bureaucrats, soldiers, and businessmen, came to the United States over the same period. In this volume, we argue that the interactions of Americans and Chinese during the 1940s and the networks that

[1] Zach Fredman, *The Tormented Alliance: American Servicemen and the Occupation of China, 1941–1949* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 3; John Pomfret, *The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom: America and China, 1776 to the Present* (New York: Henry Holt, 2016), 4.

they built shaped the rise and fall of the Sino-US alliance, led to the development of new and powerful institutions, and helped lay the blueprint for a postwar world order that would transform both countries, most of Asia, and, one could argue, the world.

For scholars, the grassroots engagements between Americans and Chinese in the 1940s has been largely overlooked, or at best reduced to a side show in a performance dominated by high-level diplomats and military leaders. The works they wrote are foundational and have stood the test of time.[2] Yet, they also typically replay a well-worn plot, played by a familiar cast of characters: above all the Republic of China's (ROC) supreme leader Chiang Kai-shek and his prickly American chief of staff, General Joseph Stilwell. Other key players include the American aviator Claire Chennault, who led the famed group of American airmen known on both sides of the Pacific as the "Flying Tigers" (*Feihudui* in Chinese), China's foreign minister Song Ziwen (known in English as T. V. Soong), Chiang Kai-shek's wife Song Meiling (known in English as either Soong Mei-ling or Madame Chiang Kai-shek), and a handful of well-known Chinese and American public figures.[3] It is impossible to deny

[2] See, for example, Tang Tsou, *America's Failure in China, 1941–1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963); Michael Schaller, *The U.S. Crusade in China, 1938–1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978); Lloyd Eastman, *Seeds of Destruction: Nationalist China in War and Revolution, 1937–1945* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1984); Bevin Alexander, *The Strange Connection: U.S. Intervention in China, 1944–1972* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 1–72.

[3] Exceptions that provide grassroots perspectives and incorporate Chinese-language sources include Meredith Oyen, *The Diplomacy of Migration: Translational Lives and the Making of U.S.-Chinese Relations in the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016); Charlotte Brooks, *American Exodus: Second-Generation Chinese Americans in China, 1901–1949* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019); Edward J. M. Rhoads, *War and Revolution in South China: The Story of a Transnational Biracial Family, 1936–1951* (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Press, 2022). There are several important top-down studies that incorporate both Chinese and American sources. Hsi-sheng Ch'i, *The Much-Troubled Alliance: US-China Military Cooperation during the Pacific War, 1941–1945* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2016) provides the most detail on the clash between Chiang and Stilwell. Jay Taylor, *The Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-shek and the Struggle for Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009) contains several chapters on the 1940s that use Chiang's diary to examine Chiang's relationships with Stilwell and other American officials. The first book to reevaluate Stilwell's role in China using Chinese-language sources is Hans J. van de Ven, *War and Nationalism in China, 1925–1945* (London: Routledge, 2003), which covers Stilwell and the US-ROC alliance in the first chapter. A more recent work exploring the Chiang–Stilwell relationship and US-ROC military cooperation is Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally: China's World War II, 1937–1945* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2013). Maochun Yu, *The Dragon's War: Allied Operations and the Fate of China, 1937–1947* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2013), provides a succinct overview of Allied military and intelligence operations in China. Xiaoyuan Liu, *A Partnership for Disorder: China, the United States, and Their Policies for the Postwar Disposition of the Japanese Empire, 1941–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) is a key early work focused on comparing US and Chinese government policy planning during World War II. Important works on US-ROC intelligence cooperation during the war include Maochun Yu, *OSS in China: Prelude to Cold War* (New

the powerful impact that these individuals had in shaping the Sino-American relationship and the overall course of the war in Asia. Yet, as the chapters in this volume demonstrate, this top-down approach fails to reveal the long-term impact and resonance of the Sino-American engagement in the 1940s.

This volume is dedicated to offering a new perspective of the Sino-American wartime relationship: one that takes seriously the grassroots engagements between Chinese and American actors and ideas during the crucial war years from 1937 to 1949. To be sure, the outbreak of the war in 1937 or even the beginning of the alliance after Pearl Harbor was not the beginning point of Sino-American interaction or even the origin of grassroots engagements between Americans and Chinese. Rather, these critical events served as an accelerant, driving the formation of new engagements and new relationships among a motley array of Chinese and Americans who have long flown under the radar. But as this volume makes clear, these informal, and often ad hoc actors – people operating outside the highest ranks of power – played a critical role in creating the largely unexplored grassroots transnational networks that undergirded the US-China relationship and foreshadowed new modes of American engagement with Asia during the Cold War.

Before Pearl Harbor, many leading American actors in China – including even military and intelligence advisors employed by Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Party – were private citizens with only tenuous connections to the US government. Even after the United States entered the war, the Sino-US relationship was shaped and maintained by a vast network of grassroots, non-state actors, with Americans and Chinese figuring out how to work with one another through trial and error. By Japan's surrender, however, these informal, ad hoc networks were quickly becoming institutionalized, scaled up, and tied directly to US organs of power. The grassroots networks forged during the war served as a foundation for America's postwar military and technical assistance programs, its overseas military base network and asymmetrical alliance system, its intelligence partnerships, and a US-dollar dominated trade system. Taken together, these legacies formed the blueprint for postwar relations with a network of American allies in Asia and beyond. Grassroots wartime engagements, as this volume reveals, are crucial to understanding the making of the US-dominated Cold War order.

Each of the thirteen chapters in this volume shines a new light on these grassroots actors and the transnational networks that they engineered and maintained. The essays in this volume privilege neither the role of grassroots Chinese actors, nor their American counterparts. Rather, relying on primary sources from the United States, China, and Taiwan, we put Chinese and

Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997); Frederic Wakeman, *Spymaster: Dai Li and the Chinese Secret Service* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

American grassroots actors into dialogue with one another, thereby revealing the powerful resonance of the trans-Pacific connections that they mutually forged during the war years.[4] By examining interactions among the various Chinese and American actors in the dynamic wartime environment, our volume reveals a new perspective on the foundations of American power, the brittle nature of the Sino-American relationship, and the early formation of the institutions that shaped the Cold War Pacific.

A Grassroots History of the Sino-US Relationship

The consultants, businessmen, soldiers, and engineers who sit at the center of this volume are the inheritors of a long tradition of American non-state or perhaps semi-state actors shaping Sino-American relations. In 1784, the *Empress of China*, a merchant ship financed by wealthy American businessmen, set sail from New York harbor to the port at Guangzhou to not only trade ginseng for tea but also to deliver an official letter from the Continental Congress to the Qing dynasty's imperial court. The fuzzy line that separated the mercantile mission from the mission of representing American national interests is a common theme of Sino-American engagement well into the twentieth century.[5] Indeed, American policy toward the Qing Empire and later the Republic of China was largely driven by merchants, missionaries, and a handful of interested private citizens who often themselves served as semi-official representatives of the American government. The extent of this effort was unique to China in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and, as

[4] This approach speaks to a turn in studies of China in the past three decades, as scholarship has moved from what Paul Cohen critically referred to as an "impact-response" model that privileges the role of the West as a catalyst in driving forward the transformation of China in the twentieth century toward a more "China-centered" model. Paul A. Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

[5] This larger conclusion is a theme of the work on US-China relations in the nineteenth century, and much of this work has focused on the role of traders (in opium and other goods) and missionaries in particular. For more on this, see Michael Hunt, *The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and China to 1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983). Hunt focuses in particular on a group of state and non-state agents he refers to as the "Open Door Constituency" made up of businessmen, missionaries, and semi-government agents. See also, John Haddad, *America's First Adventure in China: Trade, Treaties, Opium and Salvation* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2013) which focuses primarily on the American perspective in the nineteenth century. Thomas McCormick's *China Market: America's Quest for Informal Empire, 1893–1901* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967) has more of a government policy centered focus but still reveals the power role of various business interests in particular in pushing American policy in the last decade of the twentieth century. See also, Pomfret, *The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom*, 10–39, 57–65; Dong Wang, *The United States and China: A History from the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2nd ed., 2021), 3–22.

scholars have noted, stands in sharp contrast to the state-driven effort that defined American engagement with China and East Asia more generally during the Cold War period.[6]

The reliance on this network of private citizens to coordinate US-China relations was driven largely by an American China policy that was rooted less in security concerns and more in expanding and protecting trading opportunities for American merchants. In the face of efforts by Japan and leading European powers to carve China up into concessions and economic spheres of influence, US Secretary of State John Hay issued a series of diplomatic notes in 1899 and 1900 advocating for an "open door" policy in China. Engineered to protect the interests of American traders, the "Open Door Notes" as they came to be known, sought to support China's territorial integrity and establish an international protocol for equal access to China's markets.[7] In his classic 1959 work, the *Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, William Appleman Williams asserts that the Open Door policy was the opening salvo of an American "informal empire" in China. The effort to protect the Open Door in China was part of a new, government-driven policy of overseas economic expansionism focused on Asia and the Pacific that was, as Williams' argues, influenced heavily by American business interests.[8]

The Tragedy of American Diplomacy has influenced multiple generations of American foreign relations scholars. But in centralizing US state and government agents, his "Open Door thesis" relegates the American businessmen who influenced US policy in China to secondary players in a larger performance that takes place in Washington. More recent scholarship on nineteenth- and twentieth-century China, much of which draws on newly available sources collected in East Asia, reveals that American businessmen, but also missionaries, educators, and other non-state actors, frequently operated according to their own interests and occasionally in ways that diverged from a centralized policy being driven from the US capital. These actors, operating via the networks that they forged with their counterparts in Asia, had a

[6] John K. Fairbank notes that in the Qing Empire in the nineteenth century, "American government programs were few." And, he continues, "American activity there was almost wholly private." This stands in contrast, Fairbank argues, to the Cold War, state-oriented projection of power in the second half of the twentieth century. See, "Introduction: The Many Faces of Protestant Missions in China and the United States" in John K. Fairbank (ed.), *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Studies in America-East Asian Relations, 1974).

[7] For a detailed description of the open door policy, see: McCormick, *China Market* and Hunt, *The Making of a Special Relationship*.

[8] William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009) 1, 3. Williams asserts that the economic orientation toward Asia was part of a search for new markets and investments by American business interests brought about the so-called closing of the frontier in the American West.

powerful influence on American policies toward China and East Asia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[9] This insight into the nature of American power in the region can only be revealed when one peers beneath the larger edifice of the state and puts sources collected in imperial capitals in North America and Western Europe in conversation with those collected in East Asia.

The Open Door heralded a new forward policy of American economic expansionism in Asia and the Pacific that resulted in the acquisition of new imperial territories in the region, including Hawaii, the Philippines, and Guam. Despite this new policy of territorial expansion, official US interactions with China continued to be shaped by complex and all too often overlapping network of public and private interests. The collapse of the Qing Empire and the founding of the Republic of China in 1912 did little to change this larger orientation, or to stem the steady stream of American businessmen, missionaries, and educators who served as a critical connection between the United States and China.

For their part, optimistic Qing officials and later their counterparts in the early Republic believed that the United States had the potential to play the role of spoiler – an ally who could counterbalance the imperial powers intent on dominating China's markets and territory.[10] The failure of the United States to do any more than simply reaffirm its policy of protecting the Open Door was a source of frustration for multiple generations of Chinese officials.[11] By the 1930s, following a period of political dissolution known as the "warlord period," a new regime had come to power in China. This regime, led by Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Party, established its capital at Nanjing in 1928. Looking back on the frustrations that an earlier generation of Chinese officials held toward the US government, in an interview with an American

[9] On the close ties between American traders and Chinese *hong* merchants in Canton during the four decades before the US and Qing governments signed the first treaty between the two nations in 1844, see John D. Wong, *Global Trade in the Nineteenth Century: Houqua and the Canton System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 72–88, 91–104. For a discussion on how the interests of American civilians in Chinese treaty ports sometimes clashed with US China policy and US federal government expectations about the responsibilities of American citizens, see Eileen Scully, *Bargaining with the State from Afar: American Citizenship in Treaty Port China, 1844–1942* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001). American missionaries' demands for protection contributed to a more hardline US policy toward China in the 1890s, aggravating tensions between the United States and the Qing Empire. They also facilitated the establishment of official Sino-US earlier in the nineteenth century, when medical missionary Peter Parker assisted US envoy Caleb Cushing in negotiating the Treaty of Wangxia in 1844. See Robert G. Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations: Perilous Past, Pragmatic Present* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 22–26.

[10] See Hunt, *The Making of a Special Relationship*, 41–61, 115–42; Pomfret, *The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom*, 33–35.

[11] See, Hunt, *The Making of a Special Relationship*, 132–42.

journalist shortly before coming to power, Chiang sneered, Americans "come to us with smiling faces," but "because we have been deceived by your sympathetic talk, we end up hating you the most."[12]

The Nationalist Party came to power with the larger goal of establishing a strong state capable of resisting foreign imperialism. At the center of this effort were costly campaigns to develop China's industry and military. As tensions heated up between China and Japan after the Japanese annexation of Manchuria in 1931, the demand for equipment, weapons, and cash only increased. Chinese officials turned to the Western powers, including the United States, to help meet these needs. American officials, however, who feared provoking a Japanese response that might jeopardize American interests in the Pacific, held the requests at arm's length. Eager to avoid making political and economic commitments, American officials emphasized neutrality and turned a deaf ear to the requests for aid from the new regime.[13] In a 1936 letter, US State Department China expert Stanley Hornbeck urged a friend to communicate to the Chinese government America's hesitancy to get embroiled in political and economic commitments overseas: "This nation has become rather tired of playing the role of Santa Claus," he wrote.[14] Eager to secure a steady stream of industrial machinery, guns, and foreign currency, Chiang Kai-shek's government instead signed a series of agreements with Adolf Hitler's National Socialist government in the 1930s and later the Soviet Union to exchange industrial goods and weapons for various Chinese raw materials.[15]

The Japanese invasion of China in 1937, and a growing fear about Japanese threats to the American empire in the Pacific, prompted a new willingness by American officials to assist the Nationalist Party government. In late 1937, in the face of the Japanese assault up the Yangtze River Valley, Chiang's regime fled to the interior and established a new wartime capital in the city of Chongqing. Eager to keep China in the war, the US government signed the

[12] Quoted in Pomfret, *The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom*, 206.

[13] Historians of the United States have shown that the concept of "neutrality," rather than "isolationism," more accurately describes US foreign policy during the interwar years. See Brooke L. Blower, "From Isolationism to Neutrality: A New Framework for Understanding American Political Culture, 1919–1941," *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 2 (April 2014), 345–76; Stephen Wertheim, *Tomorrow, the World: The Birth of U.S. Global Supremacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020).

[14] Quoted in: Shizhang Hu, *Stanley K. Hornbeck and the Open Door Policy, 1919–1937* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 215.

[15] For more on German aid in the 1930s, see William Kirby, *Germany and Republican China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1984); for Soviet aid, see John Garver, *Chinese-Soviet Relations, 1937–1945: The Diplomacy of Chinese Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), ch. 2; see also, Zhang Baijia, "China's Quest for Foreign Military Aid," in Mark Peattie, Edward Drea, and Hans van de Ven (eds.), *The Battle for China: Essays on the Military History of the Sino-Japanese War of 1937–1945* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 283–307.

first of several agreements in 1938 that promised the exchange of industrial goods for Chinese tung oil, tin and tungsten ore, and hog bristles among other products. In early 1941, Congress included the Republic of China in the landmark Lend Lease Act, which aimed to deliver food, oil, and material aid to American allies. For many scholars, the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the forging of the US-Republic of China (ROC) alliance on January 1, 1942 was a clear turning point in US-China relations. But in many respects, despite its lofty rhetoric of support for China's fight against Japan, the US government remained hesitant to make open-ended promises of aid to Chiang's regime. It also clung to a "Europe-first" policy that prompted the redirection of shipments of material promised to China to the North African and European theaters.[16]

The hesitation by American officials to aggressively support China during the early years of the war led to tensions between the two allies and often bitter exchanges between high-ranking leaders. In China, Nationalist Party officials were increasingly disillusioned by unmet American promises of economic and material aid. As they fought the Japanese in central China and supplied most of the troops resisting the Japanese assault in northern Burma, these leaders criticized the gap between high-minded rhetoric flowing out of Washington about the Sino-US alliance and the perceived American unwillingness to deliver significant levels of material support. As T. V. Soong exclaimed in an April 1942 memorandum, "From the token supply of ordnance and planes, the Chinese army cannot be blamed if it conceives that Burma is given up for lost, that no real defense of India will be attempted, that the road to China permanently lost, and that as regards the future of China, she is apt to be left to her own resources."[17]

The frustrations, which Soong and others often voiced, were taken by American officials in the State and War Department as veiled threats and ultimatums. As the war progressed, American officials increasingly viewed the Chinese leadership with suspicion, frequently describing Soong and others in Chinese leadership as being corrupt and interested in their own power and

[16] In June 1942, the War Department decided to divert heavy bombers meant for China to Africa. Charles F. Romanus and Riley Sunderland, *The United States Army in World War II, the China–Burma–India Theater: Stilwell's Mission to China* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1953), 157–58. There are several other cases of diversion of goods bound for China to North Africa and Europe from stockpiles in the United States, Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Mission to China*, 160; Ch'i Hsi-sheng, *Jianba nuzhang de mengyou: Taiping yang zhanzheng shiqi de ZhongMei junshi hezuo guanxi, 1941–1945* (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chu ban she, 2012), 34–37. See also, Judd Kinzley, "The Power of the Stockpile: American Aid and China's Wartime Everyday," *Journal of Modern Chinese History* 13, no. 1 (2019), 169–88, 177.

[17] Memorandum on China Lend-Lease Supply, Draft (April 21, 1942), China Defense Supply Collection, Hoover Institution Archive, file no. 2:18 (Stanford, CA).

wealth as much as they were interested in defeating Japan.[18] The often tense, dramatic exchanges between powerful leaders like Chiang Kai-shek, Joseph Stilwell, Franklin Roosevelt, and T. V. Soong have served as the narrative structure upon which much of the scholarship on the Sino-American wartime alliance has hung.

From the late 1930s into the early years of the American entry into the war, as American leaders tangled with their Chinese counterparts over material aid and strategy in Chongqing and Washington, a vast army of non-state actors helped forge powerful trans-Pacific networks.[19] These largely overlooked actors filled the vacuum left behind by Chinese requests for aid and American hesitation in making open-ended commitments to a regime increasingly viewed by many American officials as corrupt and inept. As such, these actors were the inheritors of the space filled by the earlier generations of non-state or semi-state agents who were likewise empowered by China's demands for support and American reticence toward the Chinese government dating back to the nineteenth century. Late in the war, however, frustrations with the Sino-American alliance, combined with looming fears about Communist revolution in China prompted the United States to assert clearer control over the war effort and over the Sino-American relationship. Rather than replacing these ad hoc actors, who had shaped US-China relations, these individuals and the trans-Pacific networks that they forged were subsumed into a centralized, statist structure. They became nodal points of a larger, more formalized apparatus directly tied to the United States and organs of power and authority in Washington.[20] Formed during the wartime period to fill the void left behind

[18] Fredman, *The Tormented Alliance*, 36–39, 46; Hans van de Ven, "Stilwell in the Stocks: The Chinese Nationalists and the Allied Powers in the Second World War," *Asian Affairs* 34, no. 3 (2003), 243–44.

[19] Michael Schaller makes this point in his book, noting "even before Pearl Harbor the Roosevelt administration saw a need to utilize informal and semi-official agents and agencies to spearhead an attack on an enemy it could not yet formally challenge." These agents were often higher-order officials themselves who tried to operate larger networks that could influence American government policy. Schaller highlights several such actors who played a powerful role in shaping American policy including Eric Carlson, a military officer with connections to President Roosevelt, who influenced American policy toward the Nationalists and the Chinese Communist Party through his contacts in the White House. At a higher level, Henry Morgenthau sought to make his own informal, ad hoc contacts in order to make an end around a Congress recalcitrant about aiding the Chinese war effort. On the Chinese side, T. V. Soong manipulated a wide array of his own contacts within the US government and its bureaucracy to aid China. Schaller, *The US Crusade in China, 1938–1945*, chs. 2 and 4.

[20] In her work on the transnational, Sino-American efforts to train a new generation of skilled Chinese workers, J. Megan Greene notes the important role that many of the Chinese who were trained in the United States or else received training from American scientists played in the Nationalist and later the Chinese Communist Party regimes. See *Building a Nation at War: Transnational Knowledge Networks and the Development of China during and after World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard East Asia Monographs, 2022).

by American officials hesitant about making a commitment to China, these networks served as the centralized, institutional framework for US alliances in Asia and the Pacific during the Cold War.

Communist victory in 1949 and the beginning of the Korean War less than a year later led to the collapse of US-China relations and the withering of the structures forged in the 1940s – at least in mainland China. Yet, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a thaw in Sino-American relations led to a new wave of ad hoc Americans actors arriving in China. Recent scholarship, focused on the role of Chinese and American businessmen, nongovernment organizations, sports teams, and academics, reveals the powerful influence of these grassroots actors, as they collectively molded and shaped US-China relations during the Mao era and the early Deng Xiaoping period.[21] Drawing on Chinese and American archives, these works downplay the centrality of political figures like Mao, Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, and Zhou Enlai focusing instead on these ad hoc actors and the trans-Pacific networks that they helped create. The efforts of these actors, which were built upon a blueprint drawn up during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, helped drive American policy in ways that continue to resonate.

Grassroots Contacts and the Making of the Cold War World

The historian Rana Mitter has lamented the conspicuous lack of scholarly work on wartime China, noting that China's wartime experiences have "disappeared down a hole created by the early Cold War." What escaped this hole in both the United States and in China, he argues, was in turn framed and then marginalized by the "toxic politics" of the era.[22] The earlier scholarship on the war and the US-China relationship, whether in English or in Chinese, focused almost exclusively on high-ranking leaders, with the aim of assigning culpability for the ultimate collapse of Chiang's regime in 1949.[23] China's

[21] See: Elizabeth O'Brien Ingelson, *Made in China: When US-China Interests Converged to Transform Global Trade* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2024); Pete Millwood, *Improbably Diplomats: How Ping Pong Players, Musicians, and Scientists Remade US-China Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022). See also, Christian Talley, *Forgotten Vanguard: Informal Diplomacy and the Rise of United States-China Trade, 1972–1980* (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2018). For more on the development of academic connections in the era of rapprochement, see Fabio Lanza, *The End of Concern: Maoist China, Activism, and Asian Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

[22] Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*, 10.

[23] This narrow perspective infuses much of the literature on the American side. See Schaller, *The U.S. Crusade in China*; Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Mission to China*; Charles F. Romanus and Riley Sunderland, *The United States Army in World War II, the China–Burma–India Theater: Stilwell's Command Problems* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1955), Romanus and Sunderland, *The United States Army in World War II, the China–*