H-Diplo ROUNDTABLE XXIV-36


21 July 2023 | [https://hdiplo.org/to/RT24-36](https://hdiplo.org/to/RT24-36)

Editor: Diane Labrosse
Commissioning Editor: Dong Wang
Production Editor: Christopher Ball
Copy Editor: Bethany Keenan

Contents

Introduction by Charles W. Hayford, Independent Scholar.......................................................... 2
Review by Parks M. Coble, University of Nebraska-Lincoln......................................................... 7
Review by Stephen G. Craft, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University (Daytona Beach, FL)................. 13
Review by Meredith Oyen, University of Maryland, Baltimore County........................................ 18
Response by Zach Fredman, Duke Kunshan University................................................................. 21
“Occupation, Alliance and America’s Failed Empire: American Servicemen in China, 1941-1949.”

*America’s Failure in China* could be the title of most books on American relations with China leading up to the revolution of 1949 (and not a few on relations after that). *Tormented Alliance* is no exception, but Zach Fredman writes that this is “a new story about the formation, evolution, and undoing of the U.S.-R.O.C. alliance,” which is a “tale that has never been told before” (3). This is not the orthodox view of diplomacy from on high, he explains, but a revisionist view of ground-level China, and how everyday abuse of power, oblivious racism, sexual predation, and imperial contempt led to the “inexorable transformation of an uneasy wartime alliance into a military occupation characterized by mutual loathing” (166).

Fredman writes that after Pearl Harbor, the two sides entered a hasty, necessary, shot-gun “tormented” alliance with expectations that did not jibe with the other’s expectations or long-term realities. President Franklin D. Roosevelt promised to treat China as if it were a Great Power in return for staying in the war and preparing a launching-ground for the invasion of Japan. Chinese Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek accepted US General Joseph W. Stilwell as his chief of staff, to their mutual quick regret. Chiang also welcomed American servicemen to help modernize the Nationalist army, but their long train of abuses and repeated injuries weakened the legitimacy of his government. After 1945, Marines who had been sent to accept the Japanese surrender in North China went feral, and their crimes and misdemeanors were meat for Chinese Communist Party propagandists. American military advice and limited support after the war, Fredman writes, “facilitated Chiang’s pursuit of a fundamentally flawed strategy in Manchuria, helping pave the way for his defeat” (194).¹

Our reviewers, Parks Coble, Steven Craft, and Meredith Oyen, find Fredman’s story of wartime China to be indeed new, savvy, major, shocking, engrossing, instructive, and resonant. They praise him for recognizing the neglected military presence and his grueling research odyssey through national and local archives in China, Burma, and the United States. Oyen calls the book a “page-turner, full of bold assertions and startling details,” one that will spark discussion among scholars in many fields and hook students in undergraduate and graduate courses. The University of North Carolina Press has given us a handsome volume with maps, photos, and a ten-page chronology.

Our reviewers praise the revelatory tale of Americans in wartime China at the heart of the book, but differ with Fredman and each other on how this story relates to larger questions. The questions below are germane to both students and the larger literature on the topic.

The first one concerns what exactly “the” alliance was and what turned it into “a military occupation characterized by mutual loathing.” Could it have worked reasonably well or was it simply a “poisoned alliance,” as Rana Mitter eloquently puts it? ²

Here and in the following questions the reviewers and Fredman strike different balances between several types of explanation. One approach emphasizes cultural factors such as race, gender, attitude, perception, and understanding, while another emphasizes situation: *realpolitik* national interest, global strategy, military necessity, and zero-sum resources. American decision-makers and servicemen were surely racist imperialists and Chinese surely experienced resentment and humiliation, which are cultural factors. A situational proponent would ask, however, to what extent cultural factors affected the alliance. How would Washington’s

---

¹ I thank Steven I. Levine and several friends who criticized earlier versions of this essay.

policy calculation in 1941 or 1943 or even 1948 have been substantially different if China had been populated by blue-eyed Presbyterians?

Fredman and Oyen focus on cultural factors. Fredman says that both countries benefitted from the alliance because China kept Japanese troops from redeploying in the Pacific and that together the two countries “beat Japan into submission” (1). This leaves the impression that the alliance should have succeeded, but was poisoned by American racism, imperial arrogance, and Orientalist marginalization of China. While the undoing was “not inevitable,” saving the alliance would have “required Americans to respect Chinese dignity” (15-16). The “missed opportunity,” he adds, “was the failure of American military personnel to get along with their allies” (168). Oyen agrees: “perceptions of foreign countries, and therefore relations between them, can be shaped from the ground up.”

Coble and Craft put more weight on the situations that shaped decisions, whether justifiable or not in later accounts. Coble says that the American “concern for China, while important, was secondary.” He argues that after the 1943 Cairo Conference the United States “did not need to rely on China to win the war, and marginalized the Chiang government for strategic reasons.” Problems in the alliance were “driven more by larger geo-political forces.” Coble and Craft point to the changing military situation after 1943. The US Navy’s blockade now prevented Japanese troops from leaving until the war was ended by the atomic bomb (which Fredman does not mention), and by 1,500,000 Soviet troops, which Fredman describes as “last-minute assistance” (1).

The next question segues to “occupation” and what it means. The first sentence of the Introduction declares that “a military alliance with the United States means a military occupation by the United States.”

Fredman notes and dismisses the 1907 international law that defines “occupation” as territory taken in battle. He finds that the American presence was an occupation because the evidence “left me with no other conclusion.” (1) Oyen writes that while she at first found the term “odd,” she agrees that “perceptions” can be shaped from the ground up and that the “unequal hierarchies and power dynamics … better resemble a forced occupation than a true partnership.” It would be helpful to know if Fredman found the Chinese term in the archival Chinese sources.

Craft takes the opposite position: “I do not agree that the presence of the US military in a country is always perceived as an occupation.” Noting that Fredman does not define the term, Craft expands on the various legal concepts and what occupation meant in other countries. Coble notes, “I would not characterize the American military presence as an occupation.” The total number of American soldiers in the entire period added up to only a little more than 121,000 (3).

This discussion assumes that “occupation” is a binary: a country, like an airplane lavatory, is either occupied or not. But “occupation” covers various degrees of control in various legal, subjective, or rhetorical senses. “Occupation” may not even be central to the book’s argument about China, but an illuminating

---

3 The footnotes in the Introduction are rich on global misconduct of US forces, global US military bases, postwar empire, and prewar American empire, but not on diplomatic topics, even in Chapter 3.

4 Crucial domestic and international shifts in the year 1943 are explored in Joseph Esherick and Matthew T. Combs, eds., 1943: China at the Crossroads (Ithaca, NY: East Asia Program, Cornell University, 2015).


6 The word does not appear again after page 20 until chapter 6, “The Postwar Occupation.”
review-of-the-field article by Fredman clarifies how it works as a key word to place his China story in the field of American Empire Studies.7

Another question is whether the “The Man Who Lost China” was Joseph Stilwell or Chiang Kai-shek. Neither, of course, as Fredman and generations of scholars agree (yet continue to debate 11, 168).8 But the question gets at the basic issue of foreign presence and Chinese agency.

Fredman confronts the charge that Chiang lost China and deserved to. “Most studies” after the war, he argues, took Stilwell’s Orientalist disparagement of Chiang as their “starting point.” He says the popular and scholarly view of Chiang as incompetent, feudal minded, and reluctant to go on the offensive “originated with” Theodore White and Annalee Jacoby’s 1946 Thunder out of China (3; 207 n. 8).9 Fredman builds on and adds a new dimension to the revisionist rebuttal of this postwar orthodoxy presented in recent classics by Hans van de Ven, Rana Mitter, and Jay Taylor. 10

American leaders didn’t “lose” China, Fredman agrees, but he does not let them off the hook: “complicity with the American racism and violent misconduct … drained Chiang’s regime of legitimacy” (2); Stilwell dismissed Chiang’s traditional defensive strategy as passive and feminine, but it successfully prevented Japanese troops from redeploying to the Pacific; the American preference for offense pressured Chiang into a disastrous Burma campaign that decimated loyal troops which could have saved the Nationalist government after the war; General George Marshall encouraged Chiang to confront the Communists in Manchuria and gave Nationalist generals “just enough rope to hang themselves” (169); and that “the fact remains that the U.S. military presence did indeed play a significant role in Chiang’s defeat” (168).

Coble determines that the case is overstated: “The American role in China in the aftermath of Japanese surrender certainly aided the Communists but I do not think it caused their success.” Coble mentions his own recent book, The Collapse of Nationalist China, which emphasizes Nationalist failures and Communist successes even in places with no feral Marines.11 More importantly, Chiang was no puppet, as Fredman emphasizes (98, 100, 106). Chiang ignored Marshall’s sharp warning against overextension because he had an historic vision of a unified China that led him to throw the dice in Manchuria. Even Jay Taylor’s revisionist biography says Chiang’s “administrative and military leadership after V.J. Day, however, was a disaster.” 12

Joseph Esherick and Matthew Combs caution that it is wrong put too much weight on Sino-American relations rather than Chinese choices, mistakes, and politics.13 A better question than Chiang versus Stilwell would be Chiang versus Chinese Communist Party leader Mao Zedong: that is, not “Who Lost China?” but “Who Won It?” An extended discussion is for another day, but Tormented Alliance says little about positive strategies of the Chinese Communist Party except for its (cultural) use of the American presence as

---

9 Hans van de Ven, “The Sino-Japanese War in History,” in Peattie, Drea, and Van de Ven, eds., The Battle for China, 449. Van de Ven and Fredman both point to works by Lloyd Eastman, such as Seeds of Destruction: Nationalist China in War and Revolution (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1984), but Eastman’s views, right or wrong, did not originate in the selected thought of Joseph Stilwell.
12 Taylor, The Generalissimo, 591. The military complexities are addressed in Van de Ven, China at War, 230-236.
13 Esherick and Combs, 1943: xiii.
propaganda and the negative force of American crimes in demoralizing Nationalist armies fighting Communists in Manchuria.

In August 1949, well before Mao Zedong would announce the establishment of the People’s Republic on October 1, the State Department proleptically issued the China White Paper to explain why “the time had come to dump its erstwhile ally.” The editors put “the sole blame” on the Nationalists, writes Fredman, but they included no mention of American imperialism, toxic military advice, crimes, or sexual misconduct (196-197). The hasty White Paper is a sitting duck and Fredman rightly skewers it, but Coble and Craft suggest weighty situational post-war studies that would be fair game.

The final discussion question concerns notions of empire. Tormented Alliance frames the arc of American empire. After Japan liberated Asian colonies, Western powers moved from a “traditional imperial mode of control to a postimperial mode of domination and wielding power” (9). Direct territorial administration came to seem inefficient, costly, and bad press. Why pay for empire if you can get the benefits for free?

“History matters,” Fredman says in conclusion. Even non-territorial empire doesn’t come for free, as Americans found in Korea, and policy-makers learned the wrong lessons from the China experience when they sent the military to Vietnam. In the wake of America’s failure in Afghanistan, Fredman urges policymakers who preside over thousands of military bases in today’s American Empire to heed the lessons of wartime China. To summarize Fredman’s eloquent rehearsal of these lessons: The United States cannot imbue a foreign army with fighting spirit; a regime that needs American military presence to stay in power will not stay in power; the inequality in neo-colonial power means that Americans do not need to correct, learn from, or even acknowledge their mistakes—they blame the locals and go home; even good intentions place the American military in situations where power corrupts; locals experience racism, sexual exploitation, and humiliation, not the good intentions; extraterritoriality turns Americans into an occupying force that feels immune and superior to locals; American military commit unpunishable crimes because they can; and American occupation delegitimizes the government that accepts it (206).

Tormented Alliance shows its importance by inviting further discussion to weigh varied factors and explanations. Oyen and Fredman reflect a fortunate situation in which fields such as American foreign relations and American Empire now have scholars with industrial-strength Chinese language and research skills. It may be significant, however, that they tend to explain the undoing of the alliance with cultural factors on the American side, such as racism, imperialism, and humiliation, while Craft and Coble, who were trained in the fields of Modern China and Chinese Foreign Relations, tend to give greater weight to Chinese choices and responsibility.

In the end, it is as futile to argue which group of factors was more weighty as it is to argue which straw broke the camel’s back (every straw is just as weighty as the last one). Scholars come with different questions and choose different materials to answer them. Fredman’s book has not convinced situationist reviewers that cultural factors in China were decisive or even necessary in undoing the alliance. Earlier historians, including revisionist ones, recognized but did not feel the need to expand on them, yet because of Fredman’s ambitious

14 The White Paper did also blame situational factors, such as the destruction of the middle-class in the war and population pressures. The book’s footnotes do not include scholarship on the period or the White Paper.
story, future historians will have to pay these cultural factors more respect when explaining America’s failure(s) in China.

Contributors:

Zach Fredman is Assistant Professor of History and Associate Chair of the Division of Arts and Humanities at Duke Kunshan University (DKU). *The Tormented Alliance: American Servicemen and the Occupation of China, 1941–1949* (University of North Carolina Press, 2022), is his first book. He is co-editor (with Judd Kinzley) of a volume on wartime Sino-US relations, forthcoming with Cambridge University Press. He is writing a book called “R&R: The US Military’s Rest and Recreation Program in the Vietnam War.” Prior to joining DKU, he held postdoctoral fellowships at Nanyang Technological University and Dartmouth College. He received his PhD from Boston University in 2016.

Charles W. Hayford is a scholar of modern Chinese history and former editor of *Journal of American-East Asian Relations*.

Parks M. Coble is the James L. Sellers Professor of History at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln where he teaches modern East Asian History. His most recent books are *China’s War Reporters: The Legacy of Resistance against Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015) and *The Collapse of Nationalist China: How Chiang Kai-shek Lost China’s Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

Stephen G. Craft is Chair and Professor of Security Studies and International Affairs at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Daytona Beach, FL. He is the author of *American Justice in Taiwan: The 1957 Riots and Cold War Policy* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2016).

Meredith Oyen is an Associate Professor of History and Director of the Asian Studies Program at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Oyen has received fellowships from NSEP Boren, Fulbright, and the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, in addition to research funding from the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations. Oyen has published articles in *Diplomatic History*, the *Journal of Cold War Studies, Modern Asian Studies*, and the *Journal of American Ethnic History*. Her first book, *The Diplomacy of Migration: Transnational Lives and the Making of U.S.-Chinese Relations in the Cold War*, was published in 2015 by Cornell University Press.
Zach Fredman’s new book, *The Tormented Alliance*, is the latest addition to works about the relationship between the United States and the Republic of China during World War II and the subsequent Chinese Civil War. It is a crowded field. Memoirs by participants, partisan accounts which re-fight both military and diplomatic wars, and popular military histories have appeared with regularity in the decades since 1949. Several works stand out. In 1963, Tang Tsou published *American’s Failure in China, 1941-1950*, which is perhaps the first comprehensive academic study of the issue.¹ Yet, the pivotal work was popular historian Barbara W. Tuchman’s *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911-45* which appeared in 1970.² Released by a commercial publisher, it was a best seller and unleashed great interest in the topic of Stilwell’s role. Tuchman generally praised Stilwell and was hostile to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. The entire issue was framed by both the American war in Vietnam and the unwillingness of the United States to recognize the People’s Republic of China. For decades after, politics loomed over the issue in American academic circles.³

As the years passed, most of the original participants died, and the bitter partisanship over the issues faded. A less emotional academic study of Sino-American relations became possible just as archival materials in China and elsewhere began to become available. Among the outstanding work done in this field, the work of two scholars, both based in the United Kingdom, stands out. Both took a more jaundiced view of Stilwell and the American effort in general. Rana Mitter produced *Forgotten Ally: China’s World War II, 1937-1945*, published in 2013.⁴ Mitter’s study was carefully researched but crafted for a more general audience than a typical academic book.

In 2018, Hans van de Ven published *China at War: Triumph and Tragedy in the Emergence of the New China*.⁵ This work masterfully covered the history of China from the foundation of the Nationalist government through to the victory of the Chinese Communists in 1949. One of the strengths of the study is van de Ven’s coverage of the Japanese Ichigo Campaign, the massive attack launched by the Japanese against the Chinese Nationalist position late in the war. Both of these studies highlight flaws in Stilwell’s leadership as a military man and as an advisor to Chiang Kai-shek.

Zach Fredman’s *The Tormented Alliance* offers an original and important study that approaches the topic from a new perspective: from the bottom up. Although Stilwell, Claire Chennault (the commander of the famous Flying Tigers), and General Albert Wedemeyer, who replaced Stilwell, appear in his account, the focus is on American soldiers and their interactions with China. Fredman uses memoirs, accounts from the Veterans Oral History project that is housed in the Library of Congress, and archives in the United States, the United Kingdom, the People’s Republic of China, Taiwan, and Myanmar. He describes the experience of the ordinary American soldier serving in China and Burma as well as interactions with Chinese of all walks of life. Alas, it is not a pretty picture.

About 70,000 American soldiers served in China at the peak. It was not a large group, but it was a specialized one. There were no regular American ground forces in China; most were pilots or support crews for aircraft. Others were involved in advising and training Chinese personnel. Since almost no women were assigned to

---

China or Burma, the group was virtually all male. And it was essentially all white. The American military was racially segregated in World War II, with African-American units generally barred from serving in China by Chiang Kai-shek. Many played an important role in construction of the Burma Road, an achievement which was widely acknowledged much later.6

Fredman sees a number of problems in the American mission which developed almost immediately. The first Americans to serve were actually volunteer pilots who came as mercenaries to serve under Chennault, the controversial commander who was employed by the Chinese government. The ‘American Volunteer Group,’ as it was officially known became the famous ‘Flying Tigers.’ They developed a reputation as a raucous group—hard fighting and hard partying. Most had been military pilots in America, but were provided with doctored passports which listed their professions with fake jobs such as missionary, insurance salesman, or businessman. They achieved great fame, partly by self-promotion and later by the American effort to provide the public with good news and heroes in the dark days after Pearl Harbor.7

Fredman outlines a major problem from the outset. Because the pilots were technically employees of the Chinese government, China agreed to create housing for them; the China Hostel Program, which would provide an American diet and standard of living. Even though it was a disaster from the start, China continued to house the American pilots and ground crew throughout the war. Chiang appointed Huang Renlin, the director of the War Area Service Corps, who had devised a similar program for the Nationalist government’s Soviet advisers. The hostels were built in some of the poorest areas in southwest China and along the Burma Road. Attempts to provide American-style food were largely a failure, but very expensive. Water buffalo proved a poor substitute for beef. Fredman cites numerous complaints by American personnel. One of the biggest was the smell of China—the pervasive aroma of night soil and the poor conditions of the latrines. Rats were common. Many of the hostels were in Yunnan province, where regional commander Long Yun was unhappy with the financial burden imposed on his government.

But living conditions were not the only problem. Fredman argues that almost none of the Americans understood any Chinese, and little effort was made to teach them. The government recruited Chinese college students who were studying English to serve as interpreters. When the numbers were insufficient, they began to draft students. Altogether, 3,300 served in the war, many of whom were inadequately trained in English. The Guomindang authorities were concerned about the political loyalty of college students, especially at Lianda, the United University which was formed in Kunming from campuses including Beida, Qinghua, and Nankai that had left the Beijing area to escape the Japanese onslaught.8 Most of the interpreters were unhappy. As college students, they felt the American soldiers were not very interesting or sophisticated. The government did not provide the funding that had been promised to many of the interpreters, who faced hardship.

Fredman notes that almost all of the Americans saw the Chinese they dealt with as petty thieves. In their opinion, everything seemed to disappear. But the high inflation rate and chronic government deficits of the late war period meant that people working with the Americans were barely paid. ‘Corruption’ was a matter of survival. As Fredman highlights, the food and living conditions which the Americans found unacceptable were far better than those of most of the cooks, staff, and even the interpreters.

---


8 The location in Kunming provided a modicum of independence as long as Long Yun remained in power in Yunnan. For further details see John Israel, *Lianda: A Chinese University in War and Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).
Fredman also describes the military-to-military relations as flawed. Chinese units that trained in India were better equipped, housed, and fed than almost any in the Chinese army. Yet their relations with their American counterparts were not good. Sun Liren’s New First Army was seen by Americans as the best military group in China. But American commanders found these troops to be anti-American in Fredman’s telling. He points to the attitude of Chinese officials, who were treated as inferiors by Americans and were expected to accept American direction.

Racism seems to have been the most pervasive cause of conflict. In the hostels, Americans used the term “boy” even for older staff, often ordered the interpreters about as if they were orderlies, and even beat workers when disputes arose. Some of Fredman’s most effective research reveals the degree to which racism permeated the relationship between Americans and Chinese at all levels. Chinese General Xiong Shihui was sent to Washington to represent the Chinese military. But he and his delegation complained they were poorly treated at every step of the way. They experienced segregation on the flights to the United States. In Miami, when they continued the journey to Washington by train, they were relegated to the train cars reserved for Blacks, which had inferior conditions.

Fredman argues that Vice-Admiral Milton Edward Miles and his Sino-American Cooperative Organization (SACO) program probably were most successful in working with Chinese at a level of equality as anyone. Miles accepted a subordinate position to General Dai Li, the head of Chiang’s secret service. He ordered his recruits to live a Chinese lifestyle including eating local food—a rarity among Americans. Fredman’s narrative contains only a few other bright spots. The government provided rewards to the ordinary Chinese who rescued nearly 900 downed American pilots, rewarding those who helped. And many were grateful to the protection which the American air bases brought. But ultimately the behavior of the American pilots, the enormous cost of providing an American lifestyle for them, and minimal pay provided for Chinese tipped the balance against welcoming the Americans.

Disputes with Americans were common, with the latter sometimes beating Chinese, as mentioned above. When extraterritoriality ended in 1943 and Americans were subject to Chinese laws, the two sides signed a Status of Forces Agreement which generally exempted American military personnel from prosecution by Chinese authorities. The result was that few American soldiers were ever punished for crimes—even serious crimes—done on Chinese soil.

Fredman devotes one chapter to “GIs and Jeep Girls.” Prostitution was common near military bases, and local Chinese resented the bar hostesses or “jeep girls” (137-145) who were seen with American GIs. Resentment of this practice increased during the war with American men and “jeep girls” sometimes being attacked by Chinese. Rumors spread that “good girls” (135-145) were being kidnapped and raped, a situation which worsened during the civil war period.

One strength of this study is that the author clearly contrasts practices in China between an all-white military and local Chinese with those in Britain and Australia. Intermarriage was one issue. Military personnel who were stationed outside of United States territory needed the permission of the theater commander to get married. Until December 1943, when the Exclusion Act was repealed, marriage between Americans and Chinese was forbidden because the bride was not eligible to become an American citizen. After the repeal, the theater commander would not give permission to marry until June 3, 1945 when a Chinese-American male was allowed to marry a Chinese woman. By contrast in Great Britain, 40,000 GIs married British women.

---

When the war began of course, an anti-Oriental immigration policy was in effect. Not only could Chinese not immigrate to the United States, but those living in America were not eligible to become citizens unless they had been born on American soil. When the policy was repealed in 1943, the Chinese quota was set at a nominal number. Discrimination against Chinese at the state level was common, with a majority of US states passing laws that prohibited racial intermarriage.10

Fredman’s study highlights the role of racism in fostering tension between the United States and China, even as they united to fight Japan. From the arrogance of American officials and commanders to the use of the term “boy” for Chinese college students, it became a flashpoint. Racist language and behavior were pervasive and public in America and the West at the time of World War Two. In popular Hollywood movies and novels, depictions of Blacks and Asians was often appalling, including the use of derogatory language. These were the attitudes that the all-white military units serving in China brought with them. Add to that the enormous gap between Americans and the deeply impoverished Chinese in the interior, and the tension that developed is not surprising.

While Feldman has done us a service by bringing these issues to the fore, I do have reservations about the book’s approach. The bottom-up perspective reveals many of the problems that the book outlines, but I do not think it matches the book’s rhetoric. He states that “a military alliance with the United States means a military occupation by the United States” (1). During the war against Japan, there were no regular American ground forces in China and, as noted above, the total American strength was approximately 70,000. Most of these were tied to air bases, with some advisers involved with training. Yet the total Chinese military was normally at least three million; the Japanese military in China ranged up to two million. The puppet regimes also had military units. The American forces were concentrated in the airbases in the southeast part of China as well as the large bases being built in Chengdu for the B-29 bombers. The behavior and racism of American forces created great tension, but I would not characterize the American military presence as an occupation.

In my view, the problems between the United States and China were driven more by larger geo-political forces. The primary goal of the United States was the defeat of Japan; its concern for China, while important, was secondary. Much of America’s China policy was politically directed by President Franklin Roosevelt for the American public. The publicity given to the Flying Tigers and the Doolittle Raid was designed to shore up American morale during the disastrous early war period. The campaign in Burma was disastrous on many levels, but ultimately did not get full support from the United States because Washington saw the theater as making only a minor contribution to Allied victory. Roosevelt recalled Stilwell, as Fredman notes, because of his concern for his re-election to a fourth term as president.

The American air bases in eastern China played an important role in gaining air superiority, but virtually all of these were lost in the Japan’s Ichigo Campaign. The Allies had not anticipated a Japanese campaign of this scale or success. The air bases at Chengdu, which had been built with a great deal of conscript labor, as Fredman details, were in operation from June 1944 as the home of the B-29 Superfortresses. On December 18, 1944, Major-General Curtis LeMay, the commander of American air forces in China, launched a raid over Wuhan using napalm and intensive bombing. But as van de Ven notes, the logistics of supplying the Chengdu base were difficult. The Burma Road had opened in early 1945 but could carry only a limited amount of material and was often closed by landslides. An oil pipeline began operating along the road in May 1945, but was often out of operation.11

In the meantime, the United States had secured the Mariana Islands in the summer of 1944 and developed air bases on Saipan and Tinian. The logistics of supplying oil and bombs to these bases was much simpler than

---


11 Van de Ven, *China at War*, 195-96.
flying material over the Hump or by land over the Burma Road. After the Wuhan Raid, the B-29s were moved from Chengdu to the Marianas and shortly were used in an intense bombing campaign against the home islands of Japan. For those in the China theater, the plans to have amphibious landings on the coast would seem to have been a go. Knowledge of the atomic bomb development was top secret, of course. SACO had been training operatives to support the campaign, but it did not happen. The United States did not need to rely on China to win the war, and marginalized the Chiang government for strategic reasons. While tense relations between Americans in China and local Chinese were a problem, it was not the driving force of the relationship in my view.

With the sudden surrender of Japan, the wartime operations came to an end, and many Americans who had been stationed in China returned home. The plans for the amphibious landing were obviously ended. But a new and disastrous phase of the Sino-American relationship developed. Fredman entitles his chapter, “Everything Comes Undone: The Postwar Occupation.” He details how American Marines, 53,000 in all, moved into Beijing, Tianjin, Dagu, and Qingdao to take surrender from the Japanese and to liberate prisoner of war camps. Eventually they moved into other cities such as Shanghai. Most of these men were veterans of intense fighting in the closing days of the war, and they had expected to be shipped home. They were not in eager for another assignment. Those in the know did feel lucky to be going to China rather than occupied Japan. There, urban areas were in ruins, but the eastern cities of China, including Beijing and even Shanghai, had escaped major damage. The latter had been home to a thriving prostitution industry for decades. It had continued throughout the war and quickly accommodated the new foreign occupiers.

Few of the GIs really understood their mission. In World War II it had been clear—defeat the Japanese and the Axis. But the political situation in China was complex. In theory, the United States asserted that it would stay out of domestic politics, but in fact intervened to support Chiang Kai-shek. But few marines understood the situation, or were interested in it. Short of going home, they engaged in drinking, prostitution, reckless driving, and even rape. Fredman details the appalling record of traffic accidents caused by drunk driving, street fights, and even shootings, which were rarely punished. In areas of China occupied by Japan, vehicles were driven on the left as was done in Japan. But when the Americans arrived, the GIs insisted on driving on the right. Fredman notes that Wedemeyer persuaded Chiang to order a switch to the right side in June 1945, but chaos continued on the streets.

Fredman includes a discussion of the “GIs quit China” movement, which was launched by the Chinese Communist Party. The famous Shen Chong rape case in December 1946, in which a nineteen year old student at Peking University was raped on Christmas Eve by two inebriated Marines, provided the spark for massive demonstrations all over China. The behavior of the Marines in this period provided fuel for the Communist movement. Here, Fredman overstates his case. The American role in China in the aftermath of Japanese surrender certainly aided the Communists, but I do not think it caused their success. The CCP had been gaining in strength both in its base areas and in the underground movement in Guomindang-controlled areas. The behavior of American forces provided fodder for their propaganda and for the mobilization of demonstrations.

Much of the book’s contents will be familiar to historians of the American military presence across the globe. As Fredman notes, many of the same problems occur in Korea and Vietnam. Racism and friction with the local population are recurring issues. The contrast between the diet and housing of American forces also clashed with the poverty of locals in those conflicts. Even now, with the all-volunteer military which is racially much more diverse and includes women, these issues continue. Anti-American activity in Okinawa, for

---

instance, has been sparked by rapes or reports of rapes and the lack of accountability in the eyes of locals.\textsuperscript{13} The American military does many things very well, but fighting in a country which is alien to most American soldiers—such as Iraq or Afghanistan—has a similar outcome to the situation in China. The debacle in Afghanistan reaffirms this issue. \textit{The Tormented Alliance} contains an early case study of this scenario. It will be of great interest to historians of the American military and to scholars of military occupations in general.

In January 1942, Nationalist China became a signatory to the United Nations Declaration, a military alliance that committed its members to use all the resources necessary to defeat the Axis powers. As with any political-military alliance, tensions existed between the allies—China, the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union—all four of whom were listed at the top in the declaration. Differing war aims and goals, prioritization of certain war theaters over others, and disagreements over how the war should be fought exacerbated the cultural and historical resentments that pre-dated the alliance. In particular, serious clashes occurred between Chiang Kai-shek, leader of Nationalist China, and Joseph Stilwell, the top American commander in the China-Burma-India Theater, culminating in Stilwell’s recall in 1944 after President Franklin Roosevelt had attempted to appoint Stilwell as the commander of all Chinese forces. Earlier studies that were critical of Nationalist China and Chiang Kai-shek tended to be based on US government publications, Stilwell’s diaries and papers, and the writings of journalists, such as Barbara Tuchman’s biography (if not hagiography) of Stilwell that appeared in 1971.1 Several years later, Christopher Thorne described Britain, the US, and China as “Allies of a Kind,” but the book’s subtitle and text suggested that Nationalist China made little contribution to the war effort.2

Zach Fredman’s Tormented Alliance reflects historical trends and revisionism. For over twenty years, historians interested in China’s war with Japan or the Chinese Civil War that followed have given more credit to Nationalist China’s war effort and have been more critical of both US actions and Stilwell’s combat leadership.3 Incidents involving US military personnel in the 1990s and early 2000s, and the Great War on Terror with America’s occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, provided a background for scholars who were interested in understanding the negative impact of the US military on host nations during World War II and the Cold War.4 Even when welcomed, the American military presence in other Allied homelands during World War II has been described as an occupation or invasion5; it is thus not surprising that Fredman describes the American forces in Nationalist China as occupiers. Moreover, by studying how US military personnel interacted with local Chinese and surroundings, and not focusing on high policy, the book provides a very different and broader perspective on the sources of tensions in US-Chinese relations.

3 Several historians have criticized Stilwell for his flawed analysis as a military attaché to China during the Sino-Japanese War, for decisions that led to Allied defeat in Burma in 1942, and for lacking any grasp of the importance of air power. See: Stephen R. MacKinnon, Whan 1938: War, Refugees, and the Making of Modern China (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008); Hans van de Ven, China at War: Triumph and Tragedy in the Emergence of the New China (Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press, 2017); Rana Mitter, Forgotten Ally: China’s World War II, 1937-1945 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013);
4 Fredman’s excellent bibliography cites works written prior to and after 9/11 that pertain to issues involving bases and the impact of American forces on locals, but two works that specifically mention Afghanistan are: Christopher Capozzola, Bound by War: How the United States Built America’s First Pacific Century (New York: Basic Books, 2020); and Stephen G. Craft, American Justice in Taiwan: The 1957 Riots and Cold War Foreign Policy (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2016).
As Fredman demonstrates, the “American experience in China” involved a great deal of friction between Americans and Chinese that was produced primarily by American personnel, who were enabled and protected by their commanders. Racism, contempt, and paternalism toward Chinese was common, and those who committed a range of criminal acts, including killings over the most trivial matters, often went unpunished or received extremely light punishment compared to Chinese who committed similar crimes. By August 1945, nearly 70,000 US service personnel were serving in southwest China. With the exception of fighter and bomber pilots and crews, most were not there to fight side-by-side with the Chinese against the Japanese. They were there mainly to train, advise, and provide logistical support. They seem comparable to what editorial cartoonist Bill Mauldin described during World War II as “garritroopers,” or men who caused problems in the rear echelon but were “too far back to git shot.”

The Nationalist government tried to accommodate Americans as guests by providing hostels that attempted to meet US standards of comfort, which exceeded that of most Chinese or any of its allies for that matter. Unsurprisingly, Americans complained about the food, odors, and the manner in which Chinese went about their lives, and used racial epithets in their complaints. In this respect, Fredman’s book is not entirely breaking new ground. Years after the war, Harold Isaacs spoke of American racism toward Chinese who had been romanticized, or as Fredman points out, were propagandized, to envision Chinese in respects that did not fit reality. Yet, Isaacs also portrayed Chinese and Chiang Kai-shek as “The Heroes Fallen” because of corruption, a charge often leveled during and after the war. By contrast, Fredman reveals that the Nationalist government’s efforts to meet the US government’s dietary demands for its troops strained local food production, and the cost of running the program became exorbitant, especially once war-time inflation set in. Efforts to relieve the Nationalists of the financial burden were rebuffed by US officials who were convinced that the requests were ploys to skim more money for Nationalist pockets. Likewise, US authorities refused to cooperate with the Nationalists in cracking down on American smuggling, property theft, acts of violent crime, vehicular accidents that often resulted in serious injuries and deaths for Chinese, and the black market. US troops were not only beyond the law because of extraterritoriality, but Americans often took the law into their own hands, including the use of force.

Fredman does not absolve Chinese of any wrongdoing, nor does he suggest that Chinese were unwilling participants. As with other populations under similar circumstances, Chinese did steal, engaged in graft and prostitution, and benefited from the black market. This did not mean, though, that Chinese deserved the blame for all incidents. Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, as commander of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, worried that ‘friction’ between American forces and their British ally would play into the hands of Nazi propaganda. By contrast, American commanders in China felt little regard for Chinese feelings, much less the notion that poor troop behavior could play into the hands of Japanese propaganda. Stilwell turned a blind eye to smuggling. Neither he nor Claire Chennault, commander of the Fourteenth Air Force, seriously cracked down on prostitution, nor were they willing to share policing duties with the Nationalists in an effort to discipline US servicemen. Albert Wedemeyer, who replaced Stilwell, did worry about the harm done to the images of American by reckless driving, assaults on locals, destruction of property, and public amorous displays with prostitutes and the young Chinese women who became known as “Jeep girls.” Even then, in the face of growing anti-Americanism, he pressured the Nationalists to stop the publication of articles that were critical of GI behavior, and to present Americans in a positive light (154-155, 157). One exception was navy officer Milton Miles, who served with the Sino-American Cooperative Organization, a joint US-Nationalist secret sabotage intelligence organization that trained Chinese to be secret policemen. Although Navy and Marine personnel held certain racialized views of Chinese capabilities and

---

were segregated in Jim Crow fashion from their Chinese trainees, Miles accepted Chinese leadership, fired people who used racial slurs, and prohibited the public displays that troubled Wedemeyer (92-93).

Fredman’s overall argument is that the created resentments damaged the US-Nationalist partnership, led to a deep hatred of Americans, and undermined the legitimacy of the Nationalist regime. An interpreter program designed to familiarize Americans with Chinese culture and to facilitate communication and Americanization of the Chinese army, using university students, only led to Chinese interpreters becoming disgruntled and disillusioned because of mistakes made by both the US military and the Nationalist government. The latter discredited an attempt by an interpreter to expose issues with the program. (64) Not all “Jeep girls” were prostitutes, but Chinese portrayed them as such or as rape victims. Fredman notes that in 1945, a number of US troops were attacked physically when they were spotted in public with a Chinese woman. As Wedemeyer requested, the Nationalist government used its propaganda machine to deny that “Jeep girls” were rape victims, and used its security forces to prevent any displays of anti-Americanism. Even if Chiang Kai-shek’s efforts to support the GIs satisfied Wedemeyer, they did nothing to stop confrontations, alleged and real sexual assaults, and violent attacks against Americans by Nationalist forces. Fredman concludes that the “Jeep girl” furor “did damage the US military’s image in wartime China more than other factor to date” (162).

Unfortunately, when over 53,000 Marine and Navy personnel arrived in October 1945 to accept the surrender of Japanese forces and assist the Nationalists in retaking territory in northern China, relations between the liberators and the liberated further deteriorated. The same pattern of culture clashes, criminal acts, Chinese price gouging and scams, and fraternization between Americans and Chinese women led to disillusionment and friction. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took advantage of real and alleged misconduct including rape to stir up anti-Americanism and discredit the Nationalists. Early 1946, one controversial rape case sparked an Anti-Brutality Movement that saw demonstrations and protest marches, some of which were led by former interpreters, against the United States. Nationalist efforts to halt the protests backfired. Fredman argues that politically, the “American military did incalculable harm to the Nationalists” (194). He does not blame the US for the loss of China, but he does think that the American “presence did play a significant role in Chiang’s defeat” in 1949 (2). Although American planners understood that the “pre-war treaty world” would never return and that the US needed to be sensitive to Chinese “dignity” (169) and avoid unequal treatment, most of the US military, from commanders on down, did not heed the warning during the war. After the war, that same behavior, combined with a ten-month arms embargo, “undermined the legitimacy of Chiang’s regime while giving the Nationalists just enough rope to hang themselves in Manchuria” (169).

Tormented Alliance is a well-written and well-articulated study of the interactions of US military personnel and the Chinese people during the war based on archival research in China, Myanmar, Taiwan, the UK and the US. The friction, hostility, tensions, and suspicions reflected among Allied leaders and their commanders were mirrored in the interactions between GI’s and the Chinese military and civilians. Although Fredman’s narrative does not compare and contrast the situation with other US occupations during the war, the American presence in China was not entirely unique. The same patterns of behavior were played out in Britain and Australia. Besides not having vast amounts of territory under Japanese occupation or controlled by the Chinese Communists, one other difference between the US presence in China compared to those countries is that troop levels peaked in 1944 thanks to D-Day and Allied advances in the Pacific. By contrast, for reasons unclear, US troop levels peaked just as the war ended even though the B-29 bombers were transferred to Saipan in early 1945 and it was already clear that China would not be a springboard for major allied military operations. A reduction in the number of troops earlier might have eased some of the tensions. Another difference is that many Chinese and Americans did not have the same sense of shared victory because there was no overland offensive to liberate territory. As Fredman points out, only when Chinese saved downed airmen was there mutual gratitude in the face of a common enemy. The significantly-decreased

---

Japanese air raids against Nationalist China afforded no opportunity for Chinese to be grateful to Americans for saving and defending their lives. Members of the Chinese-American Composite Wing who flew P-40s and P-51s seemed to get along and respect one another in their fight against the Japanese, and there seemed to be no segmentation at their air fields. Still, American pilots valued their US-trained and led counterparts over other Chinese pilots.\footnote{10}

Although there is much to agree with philosophically about the dangers of US occupations, I do not agree that the presence of the US military in a country is always perceived as an occupation. Other than a reference to Hague Regulations of 1907, which view occupations as being carried out by a “hostile army,” (1) and by definition better described Japan’s occupation of China than the American presence in southwest China,\footnote{11} Fredman does not define what he means by “occupation.” In this he is not alone, because international law and political scientists have yet to define occupation when it is a situation in which an ally stations troops on the soil of another ally for the purposes of defense and offensive operations. Occupations can take many forms and their purposes vary.\footnote{12} With the Hague Regulations in mind, though, Fredman suggests that occupations are hostile, arguing that the US occupation of China had similarities to the “US occupations of Normandy, Germany and Japan” (11). While I do not totally disagree with that statement, given that the US military failed in its responsibility to help Chinese feel secure, not all occupations or instances of a presence are comparable to being an invading army. The United States and Taiwan had a military alliance from 1954 to 1979, but there is no evidence that the US presence proved comparably hostile up to WWII even though in the 1950s, Americans acted like occupiers and were accused of turning Taiwan into a US colony.\footnote{13} Despite political tensions in the relationship, 67,000 Americans, including the families of CIA agents serving in Vietnam, lived in Taiwan by 1967, with some buying homes. By the mid-1970s, approximately 140,000 American vacationed there.\footnote{14} Because Taibei became a sex capital of the world, sex was available to all, citizens and non-citizens alike, and a considerable amount of sex tourism involving all sexes and orientations occurred in Taiwan.\footnote{15} Likewise, the US-Japan Mutual Security Treaty and the US-Korea Mutual Security have proven quite resilient despite past grievances with American misconduct or accidents comparable to what happened in China during and after the war.\footnote{16} Although there are critics of US bases or its military presence


\bibitem{11} Section III, Military Authority Over the Territory of the Hostile State, Article 42 states: “Territory is considered occupied when it is actually placed under the authority of the hostile army.” Cited in Jeri Toman and Dietrich Schindler, \textit{The Laws of Armed Conflicts: A Collection of Conventions, Resolutions and Other Documents; Fourth Revised and Completed Edition} (Leiden: Brill, 2004): 77.


\bibitem{13} Craft, \textit{American Justice in Taiwan}, 36-44.


\bibitem{15} Andrew Harris, \textit{Taipei after Dark: Blatant Sex Capital of Asia, Where Vice is Legal, and The Price Is Right} (San Bernardino, CA: Bullocks Publishing, 2019); Daniel Reid, \textit{Shots from the Hip: Sex, Drugs, and the Tao}, Book 1 (Mullumbimby, Australia: Lamplight Books, 2018)

in Europe or Asia, there is no serious clamor for the US to quit NATO, Japan, South Korea, Australia, etc., because those countries feel they are under hostile occupation.

Fredman’s message of taking heed of the lessons of the US occupation of China also does not apply just to the United States. Any power which uses force or is engaged in peacekeeping operations on foreign soil can create a hostile environment. The occupations of what became West Germany and West Berlin as well as Iraq and Afghanistan involved multiple partners who went about their tasks similarly or differently from the United States. Because of accusations of human rights violations including sexual abuse, exploitation, and rape in which no one has been prosecuted for their actions, the presence of peacekeepers and even Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) workers in several countries has become controversial. Regardless, Fredman is right that “history matters” (206)—but not just the history of past and current US occupations as understood by Americans. There are also the textbooks and memories of those citizens whose nations have been formerly occupied or who presently have a US military presence and are current or potential allies with the United States in a time of war and increasing international competition.


18 Taking Japan and Okinawa as examples, polling by Japanese newspapers in 2022 showed that while less than 50% believed the alliance brought peace and safety, that there is considerable support for revising the Status of Forces Agreement, and that over 60% of Okinawans view their burden of hosting 70% of military facilities as unfair, nothing is suggested in these polls that locals want a total withdrawal of the US military presence. A major factor is that 91% of both Japanese and Okinawans view China’s military buildup and expansion as a threat. See “60% of locals say US base burden on Okinawa ‘unfair,’ but figure lower nationwide: poll,” The Mainichi 12 May 2022, https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20220511/p2a/00m/0na/014000c. Also in 2022, Pew Research found that 89% of South Koreans, 70% of Japanese, and 54% of Australians had a favorable view of the US. Strong majorities in all three countries viewed the US as a reliable partner. See Richard Wike, Janell Fetterolf, Moira Fagen, and Sneha Gubbala. “International Attitudes toward the U.S., NATO and Russia in a Time of Crisis,” 22 June 2022, www.pewresearch.org/global/2022/06/22/international-attitudes-toward-the-u-s-nato-and-russia-in-a-time-of-crisis/.

In *The Tormented Alliance: American Servicemen and the Occupation of China, 1941-1949*, historian Zach Fredman examines the World War Two alliance between the United States and China from the ground up. Taking a step back from the Chiang Kai-shek/Joseph Stilwell/Franklin Roosevelt narratives that have dominated the historiography of World War Two in China, Fredman looks at the everyday interactions between US troops and Chinese nationals on the ground. He convincingly demonstrates that these patterns of engagement played a significant role in shaping and undermining cooperation.

*The Tormented Alliance* begins by establishing its premise that the presence of US armed forces in China during World War Two constituted a form of military occupation. Fredman argues that anywhere the more powerful US military moves in, the presence of troops brings with it unequal hierarchies and power dynamics that better resemble a forced occupation than a true partnership, even with nominal allies. This was, he notes, particularly true in China, which entered the wartime alliance after a near ‘century of humiliation’ at the hands of imperialistically minded foreigners, the United States included.

This recasting of the wartime partnership as an occupation might at first seem odd. Granted, the US-China alliance was steeped in inequality, from the primacy of the war in Europe for American strategists to the policies of extraterritoriality and Chinese exclusion that had long marked China’s unequal status in international affairs. But the best known and most often repeated narrative of the United States in the Chinese theatre of World War Two involves the experiences of Major General Joseph Stilwell, whose troubled relationship with Chiang Kai-shek and infamous dismissal of him shaped the narratives about bilateral ties for decades. But it was not just Stilwell and his staff who interacted with Chinese military, and not just civilian leaders who shaped how the countries related to one another. It was also the tens of thousands of American soldiers, sailors, and marines who brought their own prejudices and preferences into the country, and it was the Chinese citizens who ran military hostels, served as interpreters, rescued downed airmen, and interacted with American servicemen on a daily basis.

Fredman’s book details these many types of interactions, and it makes for fascinating reading. Lively, well-written, with a flair for anecdote, Fredman’s chapters on hostels, interpreters, and “jeep girls” (137) in particular fly by and should engage even that toughest of audiences: undergraduate non-majors in a history class. In six substantive chapters, he builds his argument that the fate of the alliance never hinged on Stilwell or high-level decisions; instead, it was undermined daily by low-level interactions on the ground. Far from simply affecting the execution of a war, the issues that emerged in people-to-people contact between Americans and Chinese during World War Two lingered in the postwar years. They seeped into Communist Chinese perceptions and propaganda in ways that drive a nail through the coffin of the “lost chance” thesis—the theory that the United States missed a chance for accommodation with Communist China in late 1949.

---

1 This is in part thanks to the sweeping and wildly popular account by Barbara Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), but Fredman rightly notes that the historiography of World War Two in China has been largely focused on high-level interactions, such as Wesley Bagby’s *The Eagle-Dragon Alliance: America’s Relations with China in World War II* (Newark: University of Delaware, 1992) or more recently, Hsi-Sheng Ch’i, *The Much Troubled Alliance: U.S.-China Military Cooperation During the Pacific War, 1941-45* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2015). Historian Rana Mitter has offered some corrective to this in his works, including *Forgotten Ally: China’s World War II* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), but his narrative centers on national leaders. T. Christopher Jespersen also writes about mutual perceptions of Americans and Chinese, especially with respect to print media and propaganda, in his *American Images of China: 1931-49* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

and early 1950. And, Fredman argues, they bear importance for the future of US occupations of other territories.

Fredman’s extensive research in Chinese Municipal Archives from Beijing, Chongqing, Shanghai, and Tianjin, along with the Yunnan Provincial Archives and the Second Historical Archives in Nanjing, reveals the evolution of China research since the closures affecting the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive in Beijing. Scholars of US foreign relations (and not just historians of China) increasingly turned to these smaller and more accessible archives that remained available when the larger, centrally controlled facilities stonewalled foreign researchers. Importantly, doing so not only addresses problems with access, it also allows for histories that address new topics like this one. The delightful description of the evolution of Fredman’s archival research in the introduction (which I already cannot wait to assign to undergraduate and graduate students) also prompts melancholy: for the time being, a project like this is no longer possible. The kind of multi-site archival research in mainland China that undergirds the arguments and allows Fredman to make his case for the devastating impact of patterns of routine interactions is on hold for the duration of the pandemic. The political changes brought by President Xi Jinping, coupled with the complications of the COVID-19 pandemic, have created a clear demarcation line in China-related scholarship in English, with books that came out before the shuttering of archives and those that will emerge without that access, thus offering two different paths for how to write about China.

Fredman uses his extensive research to explore the US occupation in China through six chapters, four that unpack previously little-addressed sites of contact between US servicemen and Chinese nationals, and two that step back and see bigger picture (and higher level) impacts of the day-to-day connections. The chapters are arranged first thematically, then roughly chronologically, a decision that is easy to understand but not ideal for the flow of the book. The chapters on the hostel program, interpreter program, Chinese civilians, and sexual relations act as clear building blocks for Fredman’s larger argument about how the deficiencies in these interactions undermined the alliance. The third chapter on military-to-military relations, which makes the necessary foray into discussing the Stilwell issue and the subsequent change of command, interrupts the flow of these chapters. That said, I do not have a good solution for where either could have better been positioned. It could be the first chapter, but that removes the engaging hook of the hostel program to start off the narrative. It could come fifth and before the unwinding of the relationship, but it in fact deals with issues that come chronologically earlier than the bulk of the “jeep girls” crisis discussed in the chapter on sexual relations. It does not have a good place to fit, but it differs from the chapters that surround it.

Throughout the chapters on hostels, interpreters, and civilians, an important through line in the narrative is the mutual dislike that emerged from routine daily contact between servicemen and Chinese nationals. The servicemen experiencing China up close for the first time developed contempt for it. They commented on the smells, the poverty, and the perception (both their own and as they observed in others) that Chinese lives could be considered expendable. These attitudes were not unique to American servicemen; they follow a pattern of Western interactions with China that are visible in the narratives of merchants and missionaries going back a century before the war, and are also common to refugee narratives from Central European Jews.

3 The “lost chance” thesis asserts that there had been an opportunity for accommodation between the Truman administration and Mao’s new Chinese state in the 1940s. Work in Chinese archives by scholars like Chen Jian countered the thesis by finding little evidence that the Chinese side would have accepted US overtures, even had the Truman administration been in a better position to make them. Fredman argues that the pattern of US behaviors in China during and immediately after World War Two not only affected communist attitudes toward the United States, but undermined US relations with the Nationalists as well (168). See Chen Jian, Mao’s China and the Cold War (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

4 Fredman also makes extensive use of US military archives and veteran oral histories. His description of a “summerlong archival slog” (5) at the College Park facility of the US National Archives will also elicit a sympathetic chuckle from anyone who has been there, as well as a sigh of nostalgia for the days when access was not controlled by hard-to-get appointment slots.
who sought safety in China in the 1930s and 1940s. The attitudes of US servicemen, and the contempt they found easy to express toward their Chinese counterparts, naturally angered the Chinese who came into contact with them. That the patterns placed in motion of mutual contempt filtered upward to poison the relationship is not surprising, but Fredman demonstrates exactly how clearly and convincingly it did so.

At the heart of the thesis is discussion of “jeep girls,” women who either voluntarily or involuntarily engaged in sexual relations with American servicemen. Sexual contact between American servicemen and local citizens is, as Fredman notes, an issue wherever the United States military establishes a base and an occupying force. In this case, the confluence of women who made strategic decisions to engage in sex with American servicemen for money, and the women whose choice was stripped from them through rape, makes it tempting for Chinese nationalists to view “jeep girls,” universally as one or the other, prostitutes or victims, and to construct narratives that help make sense of their relations accordingly. Creating a narrative that redeems these women and their relationships while glossing over sexual misconduct by US troops (as US officials, aided by the Nationalists, attempted) or highlighting instances of rape to rally the citizenry against the occupation (as the Communists did after the war) demonstrates the power of interpersonal relationships on the ground. The “jeep girls,” problem was an issue both during the war, affecting the US-Nationalist China alliance, and after, still affecting US-Communist China prospects. Fredman’s nuanced and thoughtful discussion of all the scenarios and their ramifications is a particularly valuable addition to the literature on US-China relations during the 1940s, where discussions of gender are traditionally limited to commentary on the infamous Soong sisters.

Overall, Fredman has offered something valuable to a literature that is increasingly finding new ways to look past high-level interactions and to remember that perceptions of foreign countries, and therefore relations between them, can be shaped from the ground up. The decade of the 1940s is an incredibly complex one for such an analysis, but Fredman proves in The Tormented Alliance that he is more than equal to the challenge.

---

5 They remain common. At the height of the blogger years, it seemed that every new Western visitor to China on an exchange program or taking up an English teaching position wrote a post at some point commenting on babies in split pants peeing in the road, smelly wet markets, or dirty streetside kitchens. Personal blogs are becoming less common, but examples include the early posts of Rachel Meets China, https://rachelmeetschina.com/2015/08/26/grocery-shopping/, or WoShoudeBuHao https://woshoudubuhao.wordpress.com/2013/01/28/the-original-whole-foods. Memoirs, too, often highlight these things. A good example of the genre is Carrie Anne Hudson, *Redefining Home: Squatty Potties, Split Pants, and Other Things that Divide my World* (Brenham, TX: Lucidbooks, 2012). The sights and smells of China, and especially of Chinese poverty, have not stopped arresting new visitors who are immune to similar offenses in their home countries, where urine-saturated parking garages and homelessness on urban streets might no longer merit a second notice.

6 The three Soong sisters were known both for their famous husbands and for their own political involvement. Soong Mei-ling, a.k.a. Madame Chiang Kai-shek, addressed a joint session of the U.S. Congress to plead for increased aid to China during World War Two. Soong Ching-ling, wife of Sun Yat-sen, rose through the Chinese Communist Party structure to become a joint vice president of the PRC. Soong Ai-ling, wife of Chinese finance minister H.H. Kung, was a very successful businesswoman in her own right. See Jung Chang, *Big Sister, Little Sister, Red Sister: Three Women at the Heart of Twentieth Century China* (New York: Albert A. Knopf, 2019).

Response by Zach Fredman, Duke Kunshan University

I want to thank Charles Hayford for writing the introduction and Parks M. Coble, Stephen G. Craft, and Meredith Oyen for their generous and insightful reviews of the Tormented Alliance. I have learned much from their work on Chinese history and US-China relations and feel truly honored that they have participated in this roundtable.1 I am also grateful to Dong Wang—another scholar whose work has influenced my own—for organizing this forum so quickly after The Tormented Alliance was published.2

I am thrilled that the reviewers highlighted the book’s bottom-up approach and its grounding in provincial and municipal Chinese archives. As Coble writes, wartime Sino-American relations “is a crowded field,” but much of this scholarship has focused on the contentious relationship between Chiang Kai-shek and Joseph Stilwell, often relying solely on English-language sources. I wrote The Tormented Alliance in part because I wanted to build on the outstanding revisionist studies of Nationalist China written by the China scholars Hans van de Ven, Rana Mitter, and Ch’i Hsi-sheng.3 Whereas these three historians have masterfully traced the Republic of China’s (ROC) contributions to the war against Japan and revealed Stilwell’s profound flaws as a military commander, my book focuses on interactions between ordinary American servicemen and the Chinese with whom they engaged while posted in Asia: hostel staff, interpreters, fellow soldiers, women, and other civilians. As Oyen notes, by combining these local archives with high-level records, my research has enabled me to show how “everyday interactions” influenced the larger politics of the alliance.

This book also connects the history of the US military presence in wartime China to the rich, interdisciplinary scholarship on American empire.4 In addition to tracing how the US-ROC alliance transformed into an occupation, The Tormented Alliance shows that American forces set patterns in China that have followed the US military around Asia to the present. “Much of the book’s contents,” Coble writes, “will be familiar to historians of the American military presence across the globe.” Craft, too, draws comparisons to postwar US military deployments in Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan.

More recently, the US war in Afghanistan revealed the enduring influence of the tormented US-ROC alliance. US forces spent nearly twenty years trying to remake Afghanistan along American lines, above all though army building. Large-scale foreign-army building as a tool of US statecraft began in wartime China, where US forces trained and equipped the better part of 36 Chinese army divisions. This effort in China, as in Afghanistan, relied on thousands of local interpreters. Throughout the Afghan War, US officials and media outlets constantly upbraided the Afghan government for its corruption, rarely pausing to consider how US aid

---


contributed to the problem. Substitute “Chiang Kai-shek” for “Hamid Karzai” and many of the diplomatic cables, military reports, and news reports from the two conflicts are practically interchangeable. At the lower levels, American troops dealt with frustrations in Afghanistan by racializing the host-country population much like their predecessors had in China and Vietnam, only with pejoratives like “Haji and “goat-fucker” standing in for “Chink” and “gook.” The Taliban, like the Chinese and Vietnamese Communists before them, exploited grassroots resentment against the US military, drew sustenance from across the border, and built up armies that proved more capable than their American-trained-and-equipped compatriots, prevailing with remarkable ease against Afghan government forces after US troops departed in 2021. But it was in wartime China that the American empire as we know it today first unfolded—and came undone.

Turning now to the reviewers’ specific critiques: Oyen wonders whether the third chapter, on military-to-military relations, could have been better positioned in the book. I wanted to organize The Tormented Alliance chronologically, but what I found in the archives convinced me to structure the book thematically, around relations between American servicemen and specific Chinese groups: hostel workers, interpreters, soldiers, civilians, and women. The hostel worker and interpreter chapters came first because these programs began before Pearl Harbor, and continued into the Pacific War as the Chinese Nationalist government’s two alliance-building initiatives. Military-to-military relations came next because strengthening the fighting efficiency of Chinese forces and carrying out aerial operations were the US military’s central aims in China. Initially, neither government gave much thought to civilians, the subject of chapter four. But interactions between GIs and civilians, particularly sexual relations, proved crucial to the alliance’s deterioration—hence a separate chapter on this topic. The final chapter, on the postwar occupation, brings the story to an end. I knew this largely thematic approach might affect flow, so I began the book with a chronology that orients readers. To retain a coherent narrative, each chapter intro follows a similar structure, looking back to the previous chapter and picking up the thread. I am pleased with how this approach turned out, but I am also happy that my new book project lends itself well to a chronological narrative.

Both Craft and Coble express reservations about characterizing the US military presence as an occupation, though Craft’s comments focus more on whether my conclusion can be applied to the presence of the US military in other countries. Again, my conclusion here followed from what I found in the archives. Chiang and senior Chinese military commanders vented time and again about American officers treating them as inferiors. They also protested endlessly—and to no avail—about US forces behaving with the impunity of an occupation force, which resulted in a significant loss of Chinese life and serious injuries due to violent crime, vehicular accidents, and accidental shootings. I agree with Coble about the role of larger geo-political forces in driving many of the problems between China and the United States, particularly President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s decision to go back on the assurances he gave Chiang at the 1943 Cairo Conference about air support and amphibious landings for the counteroffensive in Burma. But the Chinese almost invariably understood the problems with US military personnel as having resulted from the conduct of American troops and from the US military’s broader disregard for Chinese sovereignty. This comes through the archival record in everything from Chiang’s diary, to American investigations of Chinese interpreter morale, to petitions written by the parents of children killed by US forces. After Japan’s surrender, the Americans explicitly understood Operation Beleaguer, the US Marine Corps’ mission in northern China, as an occupation, and frequently used that exact term.\(^5\)

Whether a military alliance with the United States always means an occupation is admittedly a more debatable point. The US-ROC alliance was America’s most lopsided partnership during the Second World War. But as David Reynolds has shown in Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1942–1945, many British people


© 2023 The Authors | CC BY-NC-ND 3.0 US
also described the US military presence as an occupation, despite a much greater effort by US authorities—compared to their counterparts in China—to punish malfeasance, respect local sensitivities, and build a genuine partnership. Australians felt similarly, as John McKerrow argues in *The American Occupation of Australia, 1941–1945: A Marriage of Necessity.* No matter where they deployed during World War II, American troops enjoyed privileged access to land and food, disposable incomes that distorted local markets, and immunity from host country law. Combined with the US military’s rigidly heterosexual martial culture and woefully inadequate legal infrastructure, these factors led many American troops to behave like an occupying force, leaving women particularly vulnerable. This atmosphere of military impunity also characterized domestic liberty ports like New York City and Los Angeles during the war, as Aaron Hiltner’s recent book reveals. The crimes and social ills of these ‘friendly occupations’ pale in comparison to the institutionalized mass murder carried out under wartime Japanese and German rule. But while US forces certainly fought for a good cause, World War II was no ‘good war.’

The US military’s record since World War II has been mixed. Craft concedes that US military personnel “acted like occupiers” in Taiwan during the 1950s, which culminated in the May 1957 anti-American riots that Craft analyzed in his excellent book. But as Craft notes, US troops deployments continued on the island, which later became a popular American tourist destination. War and tourism intersected in Taiwan when the island hosted several hundred thousand visiting American troops as part of the US military’s Vietnam War rest and recreation (R&R) program. Taiwan’s price for joining the program was a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) that addressed core grievances dating to World War II, thus enabling Taipei to exercise jurisdiction in cases involving violent crimes committed against ROC citizens by American military personnel. This concession to local sovereignty has been central to most US SOFA agreements. But it was not enough to stop the Philippines Senate from ejecting US forces in 1991, following a long campaign by anti-base activists. In most countries, the US bases remain, as US and host country authorities have worked together to make it easier for local populations to tolerate the presence of American troops, often by moving bases away from population centers or concentrating them in areas populated by minority groups, as in Okinawa.

I was careful in *The Tormented Alliance* when dealing with the outcome of the Chinese Civil War. One cannot attribute the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) victory to a single explanation, but the US military presence did undermine Chiang’s Nationalists, both militarily and politically. The Truman administration’s policy of providing limited military support to the Nationalists—particularly the air and sealifts of hundreds of thousands of Chinese troops to formerly Japanese-held territories in fall 1945—facilitated Chiang’s pursuit of a fundamentally flawed offensive strategy in Northeast China, which Harold Tanner expertly analyzes in two books on the military history of the Civil War in Manchuria. And the conduct of US Marines in China after Japan’s surrender provided a gold mine to CCP propagandists and activists. Chinese welcomed the arrival of

---

10 Craft, *American Justice in Taiwan.*
victorious US forces in October 1945, but even larger crowds took to the streets in the winter of 1946 to 1947, demanding that they leave.

I want to again thank everyone who made this roundtable review possible. I’m tremendously grateful to H-Diplo, Charles Hayford, Dong Wang, and all three reviewers.