Vincent K.L. Chang, *Forgotten Diplomacy: The Modern Remaking of Dutch-Chinese Relations 1927–1950*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020 [Studies on Modern East Asian History 2], xix + 563 pp. ISBN 978004410701, price: EUR 149.00 (hardcover); 978004410923, EUR 149.00 (e-book).

This sturdy and thorough study focuses on an amazing and rarely researched relationship. Situated more than 5000 kilometers from each other, China and the Netherlands represented, respectively, an upcoming world power breaking away from its semicolonial past and a small country that lost its Asia imperium in the end of the period under discussion. In these years, these two opposite powers-on-the-move met each other in different common interests, such as water and cultural ties, the Second World War, decolonization, and the Chinese population of the Dutch East Indies/Indonesia.

Vincent Chang, who undertook the endeavor to fill this—not too easily accessible—lacuna in our knowledge, is well qualified to do so. As a historian and specialist in international law, rooted in a family of Chinese diplomats, he left his former Dutch law practice and wrote a PhD-dissertation on the historical development of modern Chinese diplomacy at South West University, Chongqing (2016). Well versed in both languages, Chang used official and private family archives of both sides for this book. His bibliography counts 37 pages in English, Chinese, and Dutch. In addition to a chronology of major events, he added diplomatic source material such as exchanges of notes and a treaty in both languages. As far as completeness is concerned, the reader has little to complain about.

In fact, the book covers more than the announced dates 1927–1950. The 400 years Chinese-Dutch trade relations are not omitted, and the years after 1950 explicitly worked out. But the main part of the book scrutinizes the relationship between 1927, when the Nationalist government under Chiang Kai-shek established itself in its capital Nanjing, and 1950, when in March of that year the Netherlands recognized the communist Peoples Republic of China (PCR).

Chang divides these nearly 25 years neatly in three parts: the prewar years 1927–1936; the war years 1937–1945; and the postwar years 1946–1950. In a strict structure, repeated in each part, a first chapter summarizes the international and national context very succinctly. It then analyzes the development of the bilateral ties, followed by a description of the diplomats at the legations (as of 1943 embassies) and consulates in both countries, including the Dutch colonies. It is a relevant, but sometimes less attractive part of the book. Although in all periods business relations were smaller than expected, the Dutch representation after 1945 came after the Big Four (the US, Great Britain, the Soviet Union and France) because of the ‘Indies connection’; a signal of the Dutch interest

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in China. But the book's story of diplomats engaged on location does not result in a warm people's history. Details such as official speeches and the wedding of a diplomat's daughter could have been left out.

The following chapters in each part, redress this weakness fully. They deal with specific aspects of the relations. As of 1927, the Chinese government tried to break away from its onerous semicolonial past: the nineteenth century treaty-port system. In different Chinese ports, Western powers, including the Netherlands, possessed legal extraterritoriality. In answer to Chinese efforts to rescind the system, Chinese and Dutch diplomats agreed on a new tariff treaty in 1928. More important was the resetting of the Boxer indemnities, the compensation China had to pay after the Boxer revolt against the Treaty port system powers of 1901. Following other big powers, the Netherlands remitted its considerable share in 1933. It was changed into a form of scientific, educational, and cultural 'tied aid': water conservancy work in China and the funding of Chinese students in the Netherlands. Besides the realm of direct diplomacy, water infrastructure constructed institutional and personal bridges between the two countries. In this period, the League of Nations sent out Dutch hydraulic engineers for river regulation. One of them, Francois Bourdrez, suffered a tragic death together with two Chinese colleagues, while researching one of the big rivers. He is still remembered in China, together with some Dutch colleagues, who with the newly constructed example of Delft in mind, laid the foundational stones for the Chinese Hydraulic Laboratory.

World War II, subject of the second period, raised China to a world power, on the same footing as the US, Britain, the Soviet Union. China was fully 'decolonized' and equality in international relations became the norm. In 1941 the Netherlands and China became war allies against Japan, with diplomats taking up office in the new Nationalist capital in Chongqing and London. Following its big Western brothers again, the Dutch gave up all extraterritorial rights in the new treaty of 1945. It was a period of formal progress and growing irritation at the same time. Even if, for instance, Robert van Gulik, one of the Dutch diplomatic staff in Chongqing, maintained warm personal Chinese relations, Dutch diplomats feared Chinese interference through Chinese seamen on Dutch merchant ships during the war itself, and with its two million Chinese subjects in postwar Indonesia.

The latter interest became the main point of strife as well as commonality in the postwar period. Hoping for Chinese support in the newly formed Security Council of the United Nations, the Dutch reacted positively at first to Chinese requests for protection in the wake of Indonesian attacks on Chinese population in the archipelago. But nationalist China, fighting the communists with ever diminishing success, gradually supported the independence cause

of Sukarno. When the communists claimed the 'effective rule' of the country, the pragmatic Dutch minister of foreign affairs D.U. Stikker led his government to a quick recognition of the People's Republic of China (1950). Here, as before, the author presents some individuals, such as filmmaker Joris Ivens and others, who materialized Dutch-Chinese relations on a personal level, even if without diplomatic effects.

Forgotten Diplomacy offers more than strong historical description. Vincent Chang's training and background as a lawyer appears in his analysis of treaties and relations in legal terms. He also engages himself with historiographical debates on Dutch foreign policies. Moreover, he examines the consequences of his findings for the relationship after 1950 until today. All in all, he has written a rich book, relevant for everyone interested in historical and contemporary China.

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