Ch'i Hsi-sheng


Shortly after arriving in China, Lieutenant General Joseph Stilwell told Time magazine reporter Theodore White that American problems there stemmed from “being allied to an ignorant, illiterate, superstitious, peasant son of a bitch.” White's publications—Thunder Out of China and the Stilwell Papers—along with Barbara Tuchman's hagiographic Stilwell and the American Experience in China, left Stilwell's views on Chiang Kai-shek largely unchallenged until the early twenty-first century. Ch'i Hsi-sheng's 竜拔弩張的盟友：太平洋戰爭時期的中美軍事合作關係, 1941–1945 [Allies at Daggers Drawn: China-U.S. Military Cooperation During the Pacific War, 1941–1945] provides Chiang's perspective on the alliance. A meticulous, valuable, and—at more than 700 pages—lengthy study, his reassessment of the wartime alliance centers on the relationship between Chiang and Stilwell. Ch'i relies on Chiang's diary, newly available Chinese sources, and American archives to show that Chiang was hardly the ignorant and selfish warlord that Stilwell and his comrades made him out to be. Chiang, in fact, remained eager to contribute to the Allied effort throughout the war and steadfast in his commitment to defeating the Japanese. Stilwell's and the U.S. government's worst error, according to Ch'i, was their belief that Chiang would be willing to hand over command of China's armies to a foreigner. Despite China's weaknesses, Ch'i argues, the Chinese remained deeply nationalistic, and giving Stilwell command would have weakened Chiang's authority irrevocably.

Ch'i begins by exploring Chiang's efforts to convince his allies to accept China as an equal power. After Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States and Britain rebuffed his request for representation on the Combined Chiefs of Staff and the Munitions Assignment Board. Pressing his case, Chiang sent a military mission to Washington under General Xiong Shihui. Xiong's mission, however, failed on two counts. He arrived in Washington after having been forced to ride in the back of an airplane and aboard a train car reserved for “colored” people. Once Xiong finally got down to business, the Joint Chiefs of Staff barred him from their meetings. Here the U.S. Army failed to follow the advice from its own Pocket Guide to China, which urged GIS to show the Chinese

that “Americans treat the Chinese as we treat any of our allies, and that we respect them as human beings on an equality with ourselves.” After several fruitless months, Xiong left Washington having accomplished nothing, and his frustration with American racism convinced him to press Chiang to take a hard line in his dealings with Stilwell.

Other seeds of conflict were sown in 1942. John Magruder, head of the U.S. military mission to Chongqing, decided not long after arriving that Chiang intended to hoard U.S. aid and let the Americans do the fighting. Stilwell reached the same conclusion after the first Burma campaign, and this idea filtered down among the ranks of the U.S. soldiers serving in China. Ch'i argues that Stilwell and Magruder were mistaken. Chiang wanted to fight, but he lacked the power and organizational strength to make the improvements the Americans desired.

Chiang and Stilwell also disagreed sharply about Stilwell's role. Chiang wanted an advisor along the model the Germans and Russians had set when they had served him during the late 1930s and 1940. He expected Stilwell to stay in Chongqing, familiarize himself with the military situation, devise plans for combat and military reform, and then use U.S. aid to realize these plans. Had Stilwell followed Chiang's wishes, Ch'i argues, this would have been the best contribution he could have made to China. But Stilwell wanted to command troops in the field. Chiang continued to trust Stilwell until the Burma campaign ended in failure that summer and Stilwell retreated to India against Chiang's orders. Ch'i sees Stilwell's decision as a decisive turning point. To be fair to Stilwell, it was the units who followed Chiang's orders to retreat to China that suffered the heaviest losses. The Chinese 38th Division, on the other hand, followed Stilwell to India and remained largely unscathed. Regardless of how the retreat transpired, both Chiang and Stilwell blamed the failure in Burma on each other's incompetence, and their relationship never recovered.

Chiang missed several opportunities to replace Stilwell. In June 1942, both U.S. Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall and Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson told Chiang's envoys that Washington could recall Stilwell if Chiang was unsatisfied with him. Chiang knew that Marshall and Stimson supported Stilwell, so he feared that asking for his removal would offend them. In August 1943, Roosevelt offered to recall Stilwell. Chiang's wife, however, urged him to retain Stilwell, lest his removal cause problems with Roosevelt and delay the second Burma offensive. Again Chiang vented about Stilwell, but he declined to send him home. Not until his relations with Stilwell erupted into a full-blown

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