


reconfigure both Sinophone and Chinese studies in a rapidly changing global political milieu. Its individual chapters are also excellent teaching materials for students and specialists of their respective topics.

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Sino-British Negotiations and the Search for a Post-War Settlement, 1942–1949: Treaties, Hong Kong, and Tibet

Zhaodong Wang. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2023. 241 pp. £18.50 (pbk). ISBN 9783111355689

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Scholars have long explored different aspects of the complex history of Sino-British engagements, from John King Fairbank's pioneering *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast: The Opening of the Treaty Ports, 1842–1854* (Harvard University Press, 1953) to the more recent seminal works by Robert Bickers, starting with *Britain in China* (Manchester University Press, 1999). Zhaodong Wang's *Sino-British Negotiations and the Search for a Post-War Settlement, 1942–1949: Treaties, Hong Kong, and Tibet* is one of the latest tomes to delve into the subject, this time centring on the understudied period from the Japanese occupation of British-ruled colonial territories in East and Southeast Asia to the founding of the People's Republic of China. These were years of shifting power dynamics and considerable uncertainty for both the Republic of China (ROC) – which would collapse on the mainland in 1949 – and the United Kingdom, then a declining imperial power.

This is a well-written work of international history that draws on a range of archival and published sources in English and Chinese, including records from the UK, the ROC and the United States, as well as diaries and memoirs of key figures. The book springs from Wang's doctoral dissertation and is divided into six core chapters in addition to an introduction and a very clear conclusion. Chapters one and two deal with negotiations for two Sino-British treaties: one successfully signed in 1943, that, amongst other issues, settled the abolition of British extraterritoriality, and another, a commercial treaty, that never materialized. Chapters three and four deal with Hong Kong, and chapters five and six with Tibet. The book includes a series of helpful maps.

Methodologically aligned with diplomatic history, the book places Sino-British state-to-state bilateral negotiations at the centre. Wang notes that, in the period 1942–1949, these were framed by two “underlying themes,” namely: “the elimination of the British imperialist position in China, and the establishment of an equal and reciprocal relationship” (p. 2). The author argues that those were shaped by a “complex set of domestic considerations and external influences” (p. 7) and that, despite an “encouraging start,” they “failed to reach a satisfactory settlement” (p. 215). As the book's case studies show, negotiations were often unsuccessful as the two countries had different positions vis-à-vis imperial power: British actors were keen to preserve as much of it as possible, whilst Nationalist China figures were pushing for a truly post-imperial moment in the wake of the Second World War. The book aptly shows how Sino-British relations were rarely a simple matter between two countries. Engagements with the US are central to some of the book's chapters, as both China and Britain sought to co-opt the Americans to back their interests. The position

of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and India are also addressed, and the chapters on Tibet display the agency and skill of Tibetan figures in manoeuvring post-war international links to maximize their autonomy from the Chinese central government.

The Second World War was a watershed event in China, and Sino-British relations were an area in which this was particularly evident, as historians such as Rana Mitter have noted. The globalization of the conflict in late 1941 brought the UK and the ROC together as formal allies and gave the latter a certain leverage to dismantle structures of foreign imperialism that it had intended to abolish for many years. Reassessing a well-studied case, chapter one posits that “it was the United States, rather than Britain or China, who dominated the 1943 Sino-British treaty negotiations” that formalized the end of Britain’s “informal empire” in China (p. 16), one that had been on the retreat since the Nationalists came to power in the late 1920s. However, the results were not entirely satisfactory to either side. In the case of China, the exclusion of Hong Kong, Kowloon and the New Territories from the treaty meant that a complete British decolonization in China was not achieved. Nevertheless, the abolition of extraterritoriality and other points in which the British conceded were consequential when trying to negotiate a commercial treaty. Whilst a Sino-American Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation was signed in 1946, negotiations for a Sino-British one dragged on between 1943 and 1948, and ultimately collapsed. Opposition to free movement of Chinese in other parts of the British empire was a factor, as was a hardening of the Chinese position due to public criticisms of the treaty with the US. Eventually, British policymakers preferred to delay negotiations, their reluctance to commit to a “bad treaty” no doubt aided by the changing fortunes of the Nationalists in the civil war.

Part of the “unfinished business” of the Second World War in China was the status of Hong Kong. Covering similar terrain to works by Steve Tsang, Andrew Whitfield and Wm. Roger Louis, Wang addresses the key points of contention in some detail. During the wartime negotiations that culminated in the 1943 treaty, these revolved around the legal status of the New Territories, and, in the post-war period, two key ones included the construction of the Ping Shan airport and control over the Kowloon Walled City. During the war, the British position was initially divided, with the Colonial Office more adamant in advocating a British return to Hong Kong than the Foreign Office. The Nationalists sought American support for their position on Hong Kong, with some success at first, though Roosevelt’s death would change this and British opposition to decolonizing Hong Kong grew across Whitehall. Plans for the liberation of Hong Kong from the occupying Japanese forces were made by both Chinese and British, with the latter arriving first at the war’s end – an event with long-lasting consequences. Wang suggests that the Nationalists’ determination to recover Hong Kong had waned by the end of the war (pp. 105–106), contrasting this with pressure from the Chinese public who “clamoured for the immediate return” of the territory (p. 107). Making original use of archival records held in Taiwan, the author shows how the central government received letters from consultative councils of counties, cities and provinces throughout China, urging it to negotiate the transfer of Hong Kong (and Macau) to Chinese rule. The government’s response was one of deliberation and pragmatism, essentially postponing the matter, which was arguably more a question of lack of means than of lack of will. The post-Second World War period in China was marked by domestic and external challenges, including the military pressures of the civil war that went beyond the mere “economic and financial concerns” (p. 135) highlighted by the author. Chapter four also briefly addresses issues of Sino-British cooperation under Governor Alexander Grantham and the 1948 customs and financial agreements, although the important role of T. V. Soong (Song Ziwen) during his stint as governor of Guangdong in forging this relative rapprochement could have been explored further. The chapter also touches upon how the Communists engaged (and ultimately tolerated) British rule in Hong Kong in the late 1940s and the early PRC, though the parallel with the Nationalists’ position could have been teased out more.

The last two main chapters centre on Tibet with a similar structure to those on Hong Kong: one covering developments during the war and one on post-war dynamics. The author shows how the

Second World War had a significant impact on Tibet's strategic value as a supply route between India and unoccupied China (p. 137). The central government's retreat to the Southwest also increased its relative ability, and appetite, to control Tibet's affairs. Tibetan elites became the centre of competing Chinese and British efforts to influence them (p. 184). Whilst the Nationalists were amenable to a scheme of "self-governance of high-degree" (p. 193), they were also "intransigent over their claimed sovereignty rights over Tibet" (p. 179) – which the British, mindful of their own imperial interests in the region, sought to dilute in rhetorical discussions around "suzerainty." While some within Tibet were favourable to the Kuomintang (e.g. pp. 200–201), these were outmanoeuvred in internal power struggles. Tibetan figures resisted Chinese claims of sovereignty, seeking British and American backing, but unequivocal support for independence was not granted. The book suggests the collapse of the Nationalist presence in Tibet was clear well before 1949, though their policies later influenced those of the Communists. On this, there are interesting differences and similarities with the Hong Kong case that could have been emphasized a bit more.

Overall, this a welcome addition to a growing body of scholarship reassessing the 1945 divide in China. This book will be of interest to scholars and students of international history, Chinese diplomacy and Sino-British interactions regarding Hong Kong and Tibet.

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Freedom Undone: The Assault on Liberal Values and Institutions in Hong Kong

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Over the past four years, Hong Kong has been transformed. What had been a mostly open, liberal and rights-respecting system is now a soft authoritarian one. The city's once-vaunted legal system has been weaponized to crack down on dissent. The Hong Kong government and Beijing have used the 2020 National Security Law (NSL) to prosecute activists, journalists, opposition politicians and everyday Hong Kongers seeking to exercise their rights. Thus far at least, the courts have signed off on the government's aggressive use of the law: save for two individuals whose cases are on appeal, judges have delivered guilty verdicts in all the 100-plus cases that have moved through the system.

Four years after the law went into effect, Davis is right to call Hong Kong is a "shadowed version of its former self" (p. 198). Dozens of media outlets have been shuttered, and nearly a hundred civil society organizations have closed. For the first time in post-Handover history, the legislature is devoid of pro-democratic opposition parties. It's now effectively a rubber stamp. Self-censorship is rampant among journalists, public intellectuals and academics. Even cultural institutions have not been spared. Hong Kong's world-class museums, theatres and bookshops have all had to trim their sails, and some have closed down altogether.

Perhaps the best guide to the legal aspects of the crackdown is Michael C. Davis's new book, *Freedom Undone: The Assault on Liberal Values and Institutions in Hong Kong*. Davis, a former professor of constitutional law at Hong Kong University, provides an incisive analysis of the far-