

# *The Influence of Sino-American Relations on the Nanjing National Government During the Second Sino-Japanese War*

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**Abstract:** The Second Sino-Japanese War is an important part of World War II and also a key factor in the formation of the international political situation in the contemporary world. This article focuses on the development and change of Sino-American relations during this period and concretely elaborates on three aspects: the joint fight against the Japanese fascist forces, the struggle between the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party in China, and the Soviet Union's intervention in Chinese affairs. In order to summarize the influence of the development and change of Sino-American relations on the Nanjing National Government and the resulting influence on East Asia and the post-war Cold War pattern.

**Keywords:** Sino-American relations, Nanjing National Government, Second Sino-Japanese War, Roosevelt administration, Kuomintang

## 1. Introduction

Japan's invasion of China began after the "September 18" Manchuria Incident in 1931, and a full-scale war between China and Japan broke out after the "July 7 Incident" in 1937. Because of the accumulation of irreconcilable contradictions between China and Japan in this era background, Japan launched a war of aggression against China is foreseeable. Affected by the international situation and the subsequent outbreak of the Second World War, the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) became an important part of the anti-fascist war. On this basis, Sino-American relations (The Sino-American relations in this article referred to the relations between the U.S. government and the Nanjing-Chongqing National Government led by Chiang Kai-shek, excluding the Nanjing Wang puppet regime and the Yan'an Chinese Communist regime) during this period is arguably the most important diplomatic relationship for China.

Although many scholars believe that the Second Sino-Japanese War had a limited impact on the victory of the World Anti-Fascist War, there is no doubt that China was in a key position on the world stage. First of all, China's geographical location is close to the Soviet Union, Korea, and Japan, which are all pivotal regional entities in the war and post-war era, and the situation of the Chinese National Government has an inseparable relationship with the trend of the Second World War and the political pattern of East Asia thereafter. Moreover, during the Chinese Civil War between 1946 and 1949, the National Government of China was defeated by the military of the Chinese Communist Party, which was supported by the Soviet Union. As a result, the political

power of the whole mainland of China was controlled by the communist camp. However, it was the different power fluctuations between the communists and the National Government during the Second Sino-Japanese War that had a significant influence on the subsequent civil war [1]. Studying the situation of the Chinese National Government in this period per se could better understand the political pattern in China and afterward the Cold War in East Asia and the whole world. There were frequent communications between China and the United States, involving politics, military, trade, culture, and many other aspects. This article mainly discusses the political and military issues and makes a specific analysis of three aspects: Sino-American cooperation to fight against Japanese fascists, the political propaganda of the Chinese Communist Party, and the Soviet Union's interference in China at the end of the war. These three issues respectively represent three areas that are most closely related to the developments and changes of Sino-U.S. relations — the Second World War, Chinese domestic politics, and the formation of the Cold War in Eastern Asia. The content above also played a significant revelatory role in the Sino-U.S. relations in the “New China” period after the Chinese Communist Party came to power in mainland China. Especially regarding the key issue of contemporary Sino-U.S. relations — Taiwan, the review of the history of international relations between the Kuomintang National Government and the U.S. eighty years ago could better do the study of contemporary Sino-U.S. relations a favor.

## **2. The Anti-Japanese War and the U.S. Aid to China**

By 1937, the Nanjing National Government had largely managed to unify mainland China, with the exception of Manchuria, Jehol, and parts of northern China occupied by the communists [2]. However, it was precisely in the situation of China's domestic stability that the National Government was forced to start the difficult eight-year war against Japanese aggression. The Chinese National Government fought 24 frontal campaigns against the invasion of the Japanese army, with heavy casualties of more than 3 million people. Before the start of the Pacific War between the United States and Japan, the National Government had already fought against the Japanese army in Shanghai, Nanjing, Xuzhou, Wuhan, Changsha, and other major battles. Although the National Government made a lot of deployment and active resistance, its elite troops were exhausted by the huge power discrepancy between China and Japan in the early stage of the war. When Nanjing, the capital, was going to fall, the National Government even had to move the capital temporarily to Chongqing in southwest China.

Before the Second Sino-Japanese War, although there were some exchanges and cooperation between China and the United States, especially in the economic and cultural fields, there was still a lack of a certain basis for cooperation between the governments of China and the United States [3]. Only after 1938, when American policymakers changed their assessment of Japan's intention and capability, China became strategically noteworthy to them only after the struggle in East Asia became diplomatically linked to the European theater of Washington's preoccupation. Since then, China and the United States signed the Tung Oil Loan Contract in December 1938 and the Sale and Purchase Contract of China Tin in March 1940. In particular, after the signing of The Tripartite Pact, the United States signed the American Arms Lease Act of March 1941 with the Chinese National Government to directly sell arms, and the Stabilization Fund Agreement of April 1941 to help the National Government stabilize the financial market and the wartime economy. After the United States officially entered the war, the two countries signed the Sino-U.S. \$500 million Loan Agreement, which was a free gift except for the U.S. \$20 million to be repaid after the war. These aid treaties were timely aid to the National Government, which was in a state of economic collapse and war rout, and made the National Government able to continue the war without crumbling. Fundamentally, the main reason for the change from moral assistance in the beginning to the comprehensive military alliance was the common enemy Japan's ambition.

The Chinese National Government regarded Sino-American relations as the most important foreign relations. A large number of diplomats who once studied in the U.S. exerted a prominent influence, especially the Chinese Ambassador to the U.S. Hu Shi, and Foreign Minister Soong Tzu-wen. They were familiar with the social and cultural traditions and politics of the U.S. and helped the National Government win the support of the U.S. government through their public activities. For example, during Soong's stay in the United States, he successfully secured four loans totally worth \$625 million [4]. Chiang Kai-shek's wife, Soong Mei-ling, who had studied at Wellesley College, also addressed a joint session of Congress in 1943, calling for American aid to China and a shift toward Asia in America's focus on Europe. It is also worth noting that the National Government did not officially declare war on Japan until the United States declared war on Japan following the attack on Pearl Harbor, four and a half years after the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War. It can be seen from the above that the Chinese National Government was extremely pro-American, and Chiang Kai-shek was even seen as the "pro-American leader" in China.

However, although the Roosevelt administration paid a certain amount of attention to the Chinese issue, his understanding of the Chinese issue was circumscribed. For example, in a conversation with Ambassador Hu Shih in 1939, President Roosevelt said that he intended to mediate the Sino-Japanese conflict and compared Manchuria to the agreement between the United States and Britain, which was about the joint interest and control over the two islands in the Pacific, arguing that the Manchuria issue could be solved in the same way [1]. This is obviously absurd, as the conflict between China and Japan is in no way comparable to the negotiation of interests between the two Anglo-Saxon democratic civilizations, let alone the Manchuria, which involves a much more large land area and population compared with two small islands. This alluded to the myopic and highly damaging agreement that followed at the Yalta conclave between the Roosevelt administration and the Soviet Union. The U.S. government also refused to allow China to join the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a decision that was a source of conflict with Chiang. In summary, although the Sino-U.S. alliance was close, there was a certain degree of contradiction between the Roosevelt administration and the National Government.

### **3. The Propaganda of the Chinese Communist Party**

Sino-American relations during the Second Sino-Japanese War were based on the assumption of the U.S. government that China was a world power. The problem with this hypothesis lies in two aspects: first, China's comprehensive national strength and military level are far below the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union, so it is difficult for China to fight and could only play a limited role in against Japan; Second, under the existence of many puppet governments such as Manchukuo Government and the Wang Jingwei Government, and the Chinese Communist regime, the National Government had no power to unify or command the whole country of China. Churchill argued that: it is an absolute farce to see China as one of the world's four Great Powers [5]. The Roosevelt administration based on this view would inevitably make some mistakes on the issue of China, especially when the political propaganda work of the communists had a huge influence both at home and abroad, which was highly related to the U.S-Sino relations. Actually, after the Xi'an Incident, the Red Army was nominally incorporated into the Eighth Route Army of the National Revolutionary Army and the Fourth Army of the National Revolutionary Army under the pressure of domestic and foreign forces and the war, thus beginning the so-called period of cooperation between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party. Under this "United Front", communists promised that propaganda about communism would cease [6].

However, the propaganda work of communists not only did not stop, but also took part in China's domestic and foreign situation. In particular, the newspaper and radio that the Chinese

Communist Party could publicize at will involved two key aspects in promoting the party's political propaganda. First, the Chinese Communist Party propagated that it supports and represents the values of democracy, freedom, and equality between males and females, which attracted a large number of young leftists and students in the National Government controlled area to go to Yan 'an. At the same time, they also expanded the scale of their army in the name of the cooperation between the Kuomintang and the communists. During the eight years of resistance against Japanese aggression, instead of suffering heavy losses, the communist armies increased by 3,540 percent [1]. The second purpose is to confuse the United States and other foreign governments to gain their sympathy and even support for the Chinese Communist Party. Under the instruction of Mao Tse-tung, on July 4, 1943, Xinhua Daily published an editorial titled "Ode to Democracy -- to the Independence Day of the United States". On July 4, 1944, the editorial on the Liberation Daily verbalized: what we communists are doing now is what Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and others have done in America, and it must have and has had the sympathy of the people of the United States [7]. Many Americans worked with communists behind enemy lines, not the Nationalists, and consequently, antagonistic views of their "allies" often filtered back to the United States [8]. By carefully exploiting foreign friends, such as journalist Edgar Snow, the author of "Red Star Over China", and especially the gullibility of American friends, they have succeeded in convincing many Americans of the Communist Party's embrace of democracy and the idea that a coalition government is a way out for China. It also should be emphasized that the reason why the Chinese Communist Party's propaganda differed from its actual behavior thereafter was not that they changed their mind after getting into power, but because their propaganda was a total deception, as evidenced by their disregard and disdain for these Western values as early as the purge of Anti-Bolshevik League in the 1930s and the Yan'an Rectification Movement during the Second Sino-Japanese war [9].

The contradiction between China and the United States over the Chinese Communist Party is typified by the conflict between General Joseph Warren Stilwell and Chiang Kai-shek. General Stilwell's military ability meant that he was undoubtedly a very talented commander. However, even if some discords could attribute to the political style of conduct and personal differences between the two men, as did the Burma issue involving the British, the most principal contradiction is the attitude of the communists. Stilwell wanted to revise the command structure to include the Chinese Communist army, but for Chiang Kai-shek, the existence of the Chinese Communist Party per se was always a "problem". In other words, in the view of the National Government, the communists were even a bigger enemy than Japan, which was indeed the case from the perspective of the world situation in 1944. Considering China's domestic situation, the "Xi 'an Incident" in 1936 and the "Southern Anhui Incident" in 1941 made Chiang Kai-shek's guard and vigilance to the communists reasonable. General Stilwell critiqued that Chiang Kai-shek will not take any chances on giving communists a toehold in the government, even feels that the National Government is ruled by a bunch of Nazis [10]. Stilwell's recall reflected the difference between the U.S. government, which felt that the military should be separated from politics, and the National Government, which was unwilling to separate domestic political issues from the military policy. After that, the United States hoped that China would form a coalition government, which, although democratic, also represented that the United States government was indeed influenced by the political propaganda of the Chinese Communist Party. Works by Joseph Stilwell and Edgar Snow focused on the difficulties of working with Nationalist officials and their apparent incompetence, but these descriptions were rarely considered in the long historical context [8].

#### 4. Soviet Intervention and Embryo of the Cold War

Other important factors affecting Sino-U.S. relations included the Soviet Union's interference in China's domestic affairs and the world situation at the end of World War II in 1945 moving towards the beginning of the Cold War. Since the 1920s, the Soviet Union has been involved in many domestic affairs in China, including the first cooperation between the Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang, the communist movement in China, and involved subversive acts such as the Nanjing Incident of 1927. The relationship between China and the Soviet Union has been fraught with conflicts over the communists and Russia's territorial occupation of China in history, a major task of Sino-Soviet relations was to settle sovereignty disputes over Manchuria, Outer Mongolia, and Xinjiang. Chiang Kai-shek pointed out in the 1930s that if the National Government allied with the Soviet Union in order to resist Japan, it will repeat the same mistake they had made in Guangzhou several years ago, which means that he did not want to see the tragedy that the Kuomintang leadership had been nearly overthrown by communists happen again [11].

Nevertheless, as the war turned, the United States came to realize that the Chinese battlefield was not the decisive factor for Japan's defeat, and the situation in the Pacific battlefield seemed to indicate the inevitable prospect of Japan's failure, which led to the agreement about the Far East in 1945 February to invited and bribed the Soviet Union to join the Pacific War. The three most cardinal elements of the Yalta conclave concerning China are the lease of Port Arthur as a naval base of the Soviet Union, Russian control of the port of Dairen, and Russian control of the railway system in Manchuria, which gave Russia the right to occupy Manchuria, thus providing it with a continuous base of support and aid to the Chinese Communists [2]. China is the main victim of this gross theft of territory, which has also made possible the destruction of its regime. It is no exaggeration to say that the interests of the National Government were sold directly to the Soviet Union by the Roosevelt administration. In fact, in the negotiations with the Soviet Union, Roosevelt put forward that the Kremlin should recognize the Chiang Kai-shek government, not support the Chinese Communists, and accept Chinese sovereignty over Manchuria, which Stalin superficially agreed to, meaning that Roosevelt thought what he was trying to do is minimize Soviet interference in China [12]. But in terms of the overall situation in the Far East, the Soviet Union won the key control of East Asia after only five days of fighting in the Pacific War through Stalin's brilliant deception strategy at Yalta. It was not until June 9 that the National Government learned from President Truman and U.S. Ambassador Hurley what had happened at Yalta, and the Chinese Foreign Minister Soong made a series of demands to remedy this situation [13]. For example, he suggested that the status of Port Arthur be guaranteed by the Four Powers, and asked the U.S. government to bind specific interpretations of the Yalta terms, but they were repeatedly rejected by the Truman administration. Although in the later period of Sino-Soviet negotiations, the Truman administration made some actions to minimize the Soviet Union's interference, it was only a drop in the bucket.

On the whole, the Roosevelt administration had a contradictory view on the China issue. On the one hand, they mistook seeing China as a big country, which means that the National Government had the ability to contend with the Soviet Union on the territorial problem, and dealt with the issue of the Chinese Communist Party through an agreement with the Soviet Union; on the other hand, they underestimated the issue of China, the agreement on China at the Yalta Conference even did not inform the Chiang Kai-shek before or in time at all, which led to disastrous outcomes as National Government does not have the time to prepare for the coming threats. In terms of international affairs, the Cold War pattern is becoming more and more evident, the Roosevelt government, including the Truman government after that, thus seemed to be completely obsessed with European affairs, and even more concerned about how to deal with Japan after the war when



considering the Far East. Links between the Chinese Communist Party and the Soviet Union were particularly frequent, and after the war was over, the vast countryside of Manchuria was in the hands of the Chinese Communist army, which had rushed to the northeastern provinces, where it could quickly well armed and acquired weapons from the vast stockpiles left behind by the surrendered Japanese Kwantung Army [14]. In this sense, the problem of Sino-American relations at the end of the Second Sino-Japanese War did play an indirect but inescapable role in the collapse of the National Government.

## 5. Conclusion

To sum up, Sino-American relations during the Second Sino-Japanese War were dominated by military cooperation and the National Government's dependence on the United States. American assistance played an important and positive role in the survival of China. However, on the issues related to the Chinese Communist Party and the Soviet Union, influenced by the political propaganda of the communists and Stalin's political strategy as well as the world situation, there were many changes in Sino-U.S. relations. The unclear mutual understanding and the resulting contradictions even led to the irreversible and subversive influence on the National Government after the war. There was a big difference between the National Government's understanding of the China issue and that of the Roosevelt administration, whose contempt for it and lack of recognition of the communists had a great negative impact on the situation in China after the war. After the National Government moved to Taiwan in 1949, the regime in mainland China came into the hands of the Chinese Communist Party. During the following three decades, Sino-U.S. relations and the world situation were the product of the Cold War pattern, as well as Sino-U.S. relations during the Second Sino-Japanese War. Eighty years later, the relationship between Washington and Beijing is still riddled with contradictions, including economic, military, ideological, and cultural conflicts, as well as the special issue of Taiwan, a legacy of World War II and the Chinese civil war. Re-examining the situation of China during this period is of great significance to the construction of international relations in East Asia and even the world thereafter, and it is an indispensable part of correctly understanding the problems between contemporary Sino-U.S. relations and the Taiwan problem.

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