

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: University of Oxford</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: UOA30</p>
<p>Title of case study: Chinese nationalism: how China's modern history shapes its contemporary behaviour</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>One of the most important global issues today is the growing importance of Chinese nationalism. Nationalism underpins many of the international and domestic policies of China's leadership, but the phenomenon is often treated as though it emerged only in recent years. Rana Mitter's research has challenged this view by drawing links between historical Chinese nationalism (particularly as it relates to the war against Japan, 1937-45) and its contemporary manifestations. This has been eagerly taken up both within China and internationally by the media, business and governments.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Mitter's research examines one of the most traumatic but least-understood events in modern Chinese history: the Chinese experience of the Second World War. The topic is of great importance for two main reasons. The first is historical: the immense impact of the war (15 million dead, 80-100 million refugees, utter destruction of technical and commercial infrastructure) changed China's path of development radically and paved the way for ultimate Communist victory. The second is contemporary: observation of today's Chinese politics and society suggests that the legacy of the war continues to exert a powerful influence in ways that are not well understood in the West.</p> <p>Mitter directed the Leverhulme-funded project <i>The persistence of conflict: Experience, legacy and memory of China's war with Japan</i> (2007-12). This has several key arguments overall:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) The contribution to the war against Japan of the Nationalist (Guomindang) government under Chiang Kaishek has been seriously underestimated: it bore the brunt of the wartime military and economic effort against the Japanese. (2) Policies (such as consolidated welfare authoritarianism) that are highly relevant to contemporary China, have their origins in wartime Nationalist policies, rather than in Mao's revolution. (3) The reshaping of East Asian geopolitics, and the rise of China, were largely attributable to its contributions to the Allied war effort in 1937-1945. <p>A central element of the project and Mitter's book [3.3] has been the role of the city of Chongqing (Chungking), which served as wartime capital of China between 1937 and 1945. Chongqing has once again become a major political and commercial centre, and as a result, has started to explore its own past as a means of generating greater political and economic clout in the present. The project group has made major contributions to the writing of the social history of wartime Chongqing, a project comparable with the new social history of other wartime capitals.</p> <p>The research has been supported by several grants, most importantly a five-year Leverhulme Research Leadership Award (2007-12, £800,000) which enabled Mitter to lead a research team which, over its lifetime, employed seven postdoctoral fellows and supported four doctoral students. The research included site visits and interview work in China and collaborations with Chinese institutions (e.g., through the British Academy CASS exchange) as well as extensive work in archives (notably Shanghai, Nanjing, Taipei, Chongqing, and Chengdu), as well as in Taiwan, libraries in East Asia, North America and Europe. The work has involved publication in major area studies and history journals, including two special journal issues (<i>Modern Asian Studies</i> and <i>European Journal of East Asian Studies</i>) dedicated to the project's work; around ten articles in major journals, and four major monographs by team members. Additionally the project organised some ten conferences and workshops both in Oxford and at Leiden, Harvard, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, China.</p>

Key researchers include: Rana Mitter, University Lecturer in the History and Politics of Modern China (2001-2008), Professor of the History and Politics of Modern China (since 2008); and Annie Nie, Research Assistant (2008-present), Faculty of History, University of Oxford.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

3.1. Mitter, R., *The Manchurian Myth: Nationalism, resistance and collaboration in modern China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000). [Available upon request]
 Honourable Mention, Gladstone Prize of the Royal Historical Society, 2001.

3.2. Mitter, R. *A Bitter Revolution: China's struggle with the modern world* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, pbk 2005). [Available upon request]
 Winner, Times Higher Education Supplement Young Academic Author of the Year 2005;
 Runner-up for the 2005 Longman/History Today Book of the Year prize; Finalist for British Academy Book Prize 2005; Foreign Affairs "must-read" Notable Book on China 2005;
 Translations in Romanian, Polish, Japanese.

3.3. Mitter, R., *China's War with Japan, 1937-1945: The Struggle for Survival* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin Books, 2013). [Submitted for REF 2; N01]
 reviews include "all historians of the second world war will be in Mitter's debt" (Richard Overy, *The Guardian*), "illuminating and meticulously researched" (*The Economist*), and "masterly account... wide, deep scholarship" (Jonathan Fenby, *The Times*).

3.4. Mitter, R., *Ruptured Histories: War and Memory in Post-Cold War Asia* (edited with Sheila Miyoshi Jager) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007 (5)). [Available upon request]

3.5 Mitter, R., "Old ghosts, new memories: changing China's war history in the era of post-Mao politics," in *Journal of Contemporary History* (January 2003), pp. 117-131. (peer-reviewed journal). [DOI: 10.1177/0022009403038001967]

3.6. Nie, A., "Gaming, Nationalism, and Ideological Work in Contemporary China: online games based on the War of Resistance against Japan," *Journal of Contemporary China* (2013), pp. 499-517 (peer-reviewed journal). [DOI: 10.1080/10670564.2012.748968]

Grants (to Mitter)

Philip Leverhulme Prize in History, awarded 2005 (value £50,000)

Leverhulme Research Leadership Award for project *The persistence of conflict: Experience, legacy and memory of China's war with Japan* (2007-12) (value £800,000)

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Understanding Chinese nationalism in its twentieth-century context is crucially important to diplomats, business leaders, the media and a wide public, both within China and internationally. It is a remarkable testimony to both the new openness in China and to the international standing of Rana Mitter and his collaborators that their work has received so much attention in China as well as in the West.

Working with local government in China

Since 2007, Mitter and his research team have made significant contacts with the Chongqing city government, which is eager to promote itself to the wider world and to raise awareness of its wartime history. Working with Minister Zhou Yong and his team, including the heads of the Chongqing library and Chongqing archives, Mitter has been involved in a variety of activities: these include participation in a television documentary about China's wartime role, as well as assistance in compiling materials from British archives. Wang Zhikun of the Chongqing library states: "This collaboration has helped us to internationalize the understanding of our city's history, an important cultural project that contributes to our development within China's globalizing economy." [1]

Business in China

Mitter was commissioned in 2012 by Jardine Matheson to write a history of the firm's presence in wartime China. This history will be presented to corporate clients, detailing the way in which Jardines moved their China office to Chongqing, and made a significant contribution to resistance against the Japanese. The booklet will be available both in Chinese and English, and will be a significant part of Jardine's profile. Adam Williams, Director of Jardines, notes: "This project has been very useful in helping us to link our historical presence in China to our ability to develop business links in contemporary China." [2]

Impact on public policy and business strategy

Mitter's work on nationalism has led to regular invitations to provide assessments of the origins and significance of Chinese nationalism to policymakers and business executives, including:

- Regularly contributing advice on the role of Chinese nationalism, based on a historical perspective, in shaping Chinese foreign policy. He provided such input on an ongoing basis for the Foreign Office and UK government more widely, for instance as part of a briefing group for then Foreign Secretary David Miliband (February 2008); a briefing group for a meeting with Jeremy Brown MP (new FCO minister) (June 2010); the House of Lords Call for Evidence on the EU and China (12 March 2009); at FCO small-group closed seminars on China policy (31 October 2012, with FCO Minister Hugo Swire MP); and on Britain's role in the EU (Oxford, 22 February 2013). Mitter contributed orally to the discussions in the House of Lords and at Oxford and was invited to follow up with written contributions to the 'Report on Britain's Balance of Competences in the EU' (February 2013). [3]
- Presentation to the Irish Institute of International Affairs (10 January 2013); this included a (closed) discussion on the role of nationalism in shaping EU/China relations which involved briefing members of the core Irish diplomatic team about to leave for Beijing.
- Input to new book *Turning to Face the East* by the Rt Hon Liam Byrne MP while he was Shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. Mitter appeared with Byrne to provide context on Chinese nationalism at a policymaker event at the Centre for European Reform (16 April 2013), where attendees included Simon Henry (CFO, Royal Dutch Shell), and chaired a discussion with Byrne and BBC business correspondent Linda Yueh on Night Waves on BBC Radio 3 (4 June 2013) on China's future as a business partner for the UK. Liam Byrne acknowledges Mitter's insights on contemporary debates on Chinese welfare provision (a topic on which the UK aims to provide expert advice to the PRC), in particular that this topic is "not in fact new for the CPC [Communist Party of China] but stretches right back to the party's debates during the second world war," in a trajectory to the present day where the "recalibration of the social contract will be at the core of the next decade of Chinese politics." [4]
- Presentation at a closed seminar organised by MoD/International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) on "China's Strategic Mindset" (2 October 2009); as a consequence, Mitter was invited by senior army officers to speak at a closed session for officers of the 38th Irish Brigade (Belfast) (2 July 2010).
- Mitter spoke on Chinese nationalism and its consequences at the invitation of the Absolute Return on Capital (ARC) Global Conference, for high-level investment managers (London, 22 May 2013) and has been further invited to speak to similar audiences at the annual conference of the Bank of Abu Dhabi (spring 2014) and ARC Global 2014.

Facilitating intra-Asian policy engagement

Two workshops held at Oxford (May 2012, March 2013) enabled officers of the People's Liberation Army and policy practitioners from the Indian Institute of Chinese Studies to discuss the significance of Chinese nationalism in historical perspective. One very senior officer of the People's Liberation Army found the engagement with western scholars was important for recalibrating his views on western attitudes toward China's military development, and another found interaction with Indian policymakers particularly useful in terms of understanding the variations in Chinese and Indian viewpoints on nation-building and the role of history; the latter wrote with appreciation for "your very useful academic suggestions" and is currently seeking to invite Mitter to Beijing for a follow-up conference [5].

Promoting wider public understanding of China's history

Mitter has also undertaken a variety of activities that have promoted wider public understanding of the significance of China's history in shaping contemporary Chinese nationalism: Mitter's discussion of the significance of wartime experience in shaping contemporary Sino-Japanese relations at the Commonwealth Journalists Forum (London, 22 January 2013) was published by BBC Chinese Service online, and led to extensive (and in part acrimonious) feedback [i]. In April 2013, Mitter spoke about the connections between China's wartime experience and contemporary politics on *Saturday Extra*, a major ABC (Australia) Radio National programme, which stimulated feedback and discussion on the programme's webpage [ii]. Listeners' responses included "What an interesting interview. Such a lot we don't know about the recent history of China, vs being awash with European history."; and "Fascinating. Could we hear a lot more of this scholar's interpretation of Chinese history." The debate continued with comments on pieces discussing the book in newspapers including *The Economist*, the Beijing *Global Times*, the Hong Kong South China Morning Post and the *Japan Times*. Comments included acknowledgement of "the unwritten Chinese history of the US involvement in that same war" and "One can only hope that more Japanese citizens will awaken to the delusional underpinnings of the nationalist path being pushed by Abe" [iii]. Finally, Mitter's book, *China's war with Japan, 1937-1945*, was published in July 2013 to wide and very positive reviews and its impact is likely to grow beyond the current REF period.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Testimony

- [1] Email correspondence with Minister and his team, Chongqing Municipal Government, Chongqing.
- [2] Correspondence with the Director, Jardine Matheson Ltd.
- [3] Corroboration from Head of China Section, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.
- [4] Correspondence with the Office of the former Shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.
- [5] Email correspondence with Colonel in the People's Liberation Army, China.

Other evidence sources

[i]

http://www.bbc.co.uk/zhongwen/simp/interactive/2013/01/130125_comments_ana_sino_japan.shtml

[ii] <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/saturdayextra/china3a-remembering-wwii-and-its-impact-on-china27s-foreign-p/4625346>

[iii] <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2013/07/03/commentary/antidote-for-abes-nationalism/#.UdVPZpdwZy0>