BOOK REVIEW
David Cheng Chang, *The Hijacked War: The Story of Chinese PoWs in the Korean War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020)

Elisabeth Forster, University of Southampton

The Hijacked War is an excellent book about the fates of Chinese nationals, who lived through the end of the civil war, the early Mao years, found themselves drafted into the Chinese People's Volunteer Army that fought in Korea, became prisoners of war of the United Nations Command and in the end were repatriated to mainland China or went elsewhere. The crux of the issue Chang investigates is that in 1952 the Truman administration began to insist on voluntary repatriation of the prisoners of war as part of the armistice negotiations between the United Nations Command on the side of South Korea, on the one hand, and North Korea and its ally China, on the other. Voluntary repatriation meant that prisoners did not have to return to their home country if they did not wish to do so, but could choose to go to a different country. Since mainland China strongly objected to this idea, the armistice negotiations, which had begun in 1951, dragged on until 1953. Without the voluntary repatriation clause, Chang argues, the Korean War would have ended in 1952. The insistence on voluntary repatriation, Chang tells us, was not down to the lofty ideals that others have ascribed to the Truman administration. Instead, it was the result of a mess-up. This mess-up consisted in Truman not understanding that, once he had subjected Chinese prisoners of war to anti-Communist indoctrination in the prison camps – which he did as part of the US's psychological warfare strategy –, he could not very well let them go back to mainland China without sending them to their certain deaths.

Chang has assembled an impressive amount of fascinating detail, relying on archival research as well as on significant amounts of interviews with former prisoners of war in mainland China, Taiwan, the United States, and also in Argentina and Brazil. He has also spoken to a prison guard, an interrogator and a translator. Chang connects some of the less well-known pieces of information on the political and diplomatic history of the era with vivid descriptions of individual fates. While both aspects are fascinating, to me the depictions of the individual fates are especially powerful.

Chapter Summary

The book consists of sixteen core chapters, all of which are manageable in terms of their length. This may be useful when assigning parts of the book as readings for students.

The first three chapters discuss the fates of individuals before and in the run-up to the Korean War. This provides a useful microhistory of the time period and leads Chang to conclude that there never was a "honeymoon" (p. 63) period in the People's Republic of China, but that violence was present from the very beginning. During the civil war, Chang argues, some people were coerced into joining the GMD army and severely mistreated once they were there. By contrast, they initially had a much better life in the People's Liberation Army, with more food and less abuse from their officers. However, the Communists soon subjected their recruits to indoctrination, which convinced some, but left others completely appalled. As a result, some feigned conviction of the new Communist ideology for reasons of personal safety. But in reality they were anything but convinced. This chimes interestingly with Young's observation about American prisoners of war who had been captured by China during the

Korean War and who underwent what became known as "brain washing". Young states that the American prisoners did not end up being convinced of Chinese Communist Party ideology, rather than "bor[ed]" by the indoctrination programme.[1]

In the context of China's power transition after the civil war, the Chinese People's Volunteer Army to Korea was assembled, and Chang evidences that in many cases this was anything but "voluntary". In this his analysis echoes, but also adds significant amounts of detail to, Brown.[2] Many of the volunteers used to be GMD soldiers or had worked for the GMD army in some form. For example, Li Da'an had worked as a truck driver for some time and had been attached to the GMD army during some of the civil war years. He was captured by the Chinese Communist Party, tortured and been left to starve while imprisoned by the Communists for two years. In 1951, he was conscripted into the Chinese People's Volunteer Army and there again worked as truck driver (p. 69). Some "volunteers" did not actually know what they were signing up for, but only found out the day before they crossed into Korea. Some did not have much understanding of what "resist America, aid Korea, protect the home, defend the country" 抗美援朝，保家卫国 meant, which was the propaganda slogan for the Korean War. Some had volunteered to become People's Liberation Army soldiers, not members of the People's Volunteer Army. Yet others were tricked into joining the People's Volunteer Army, e.g. by being told that they were going for "job training" (p. 60). Since simultaneously the campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries (1950-1953) was happening, some joined the Volunteer Army to avoid persecution. This, for example, was the motivation of Chen Liren, who came from a wealthy family in Guizhou, had himself been a police officer for the GMD regime and had joined anti-Communist insurgents. This put him at risk from the Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries, and he joined the military to avoid this fate. (pp. 63-65)

In chapters four to seven, Chang argues that there were political mess-ups on all sides in the early years of the Korean War, resulting in the later stalemate in the armistice negotiations. The mess-ups Chang recounts include, on the side of the United States, a peculiar failure to gather information about the Chinese People's Volunteer Army's capacity in Korea. To cite Chang directly: "'We were not reading Red Chinese radio traffic at all,' recalled Colonel James H. Polk, an intelligence officer in Tokyo. 'One reason was that they employed the Mandarin dialect. We had no Mandarin linguists.' [Intelligence chief] Willoughby explained that 'the whole linguist units had been previously deactivated' in the post-World War II retrenchment, and so 'valuable intelligence on Manchurian, Chinese and Soviet participation may never be recovered.'" (p. 88) Taking suitable military decisions was of course difficult under the circumstances. On the Chinese side, the mess-up described by Chang included propaganda that was being disseminated, and which claimed that all United Nations soldiers were weak. The Volunteers soon found this not to be true. Since, moreover, the Chinese People's Volunteer Army faced extremely harsh conditions in Korea and since, additionally, some Volunteers were repulsed by the Chinese Communist Party's policies in China, many of them surrendered to the United Nations Command. Another United States political mess-up, in Chang's interpretation, was the introduction of the anti-Communist reindoctrination program for soldiers that had been taken prisoner by the United Nations Command. It was introduced by MacArthur just before he was fired in 1951, and nobody managed to foresee the implications.

Chapters eight to fourteen, then, turn to life in the prisoner of war camps in Korea. If previously individuals had been at the mercy of brutal parties (the GMD and the Chinese Communist Party), now that the prisoners of war were removed from their influence, they turned on each other. Chang describes how the prisoner communities were divided into anti-Communist and pro-Communist prisoners, who made each other's lives hell. Here, Chang supplies vivid detail to comments already made by Young and Foot about the brutality in the camps and its impact on prisoners' attitudes towards repatriation.[3] For example, anti-Communist prisoners in some prison compounds gained power by working for the United Nations Command, and forced their fellow prisoners to engage in anti-Communist activities. This was exacerbated when the US introduced the idea that prisoners needed to "forcibly resist repatriation" (p. 207) if they wanted

to be sent somewhere other than China after the war, since such "forcible resistance" now needed to be evidenced. In response, anti-Communist prisoners of war tattooed anti-Communist messages onto their bodies, which made it impossible for them to return to mainland China afterwards. Some tortured fellow prisoners with the goal of forcing them to tattoo themselves as well, which in some cases resulted in people's deaths. One of the most notoriously brutal anti-Communists now was Li Da'an, the truck driver (p. 193). In compounds where Communist prisoners dominated, the situation was similar, just with a different ideology.

While this brutality characterized life in the camps, on the diplomatic level, the armistice talks were stalling over the repatriation question. Here, Chang again resumes the theme of mess-ups: The United States sent a relatively inexperienced team to the talks. North Korea was very keen to end the war, but China was adamant that prisoners of war should be repatriated. The United States, in turn, tried to nudge prisoners towards wanting to return to China, so as to make the armistice negotiations easier. But this was boycotted by anti-Communist prisoners, who intimidated some of their fellow prisoners into resisting repatriation. In the end, the deadlock was only broken when Stalin died in 1953 and his successors in the Soviet Union coaxed China into making peace.

Chapter fifteen is thematically something of an outlier, but very interesting. It discusses prisoner-agents, that is, educated and strongly anti-Communist prisoners who were tricked into becoming secret service agents for the United States and were, under threat of torture and execution, sent on suicide missions in North Korea. Li Da'an fell victim to this program. To exact revenge, his fellow prisoners, who had grown to hate him, recommended Li for the program, even though he did not possess the normally required level of education, and they also insisted on him going on suicide missions. He was, in the end, captured by the Communists. (pp. 349-351) Rounding the story off, chapter sixteen outlines the fate of some of the prisoners after the war. Many of those who had returned to the People's Republic of China were investigated, expelled from the People's Liberation Army or executed. Those who had gone to Taiwan were initially celebrated as "anti-Communist heroes" (p. 361). But most of them were then forced to "volunteer" for the GMD army. It is interesting to read this in conjunction with Young's work on American prisoners of war, who, after their return from Korea, were also looked at askance and suspected by the United States government to be Communists.[4]

Literature Review

Hijacked War is a valuable addition to the significant amount of scholarly ink that has been spilled on the topic of the Korean War. Such literature has included work on the war more broadly,[5] as well as some research on the prisoners of war specifically. Some of this prisoners of war literature has tackled the topic from a theoretical, post-colonial angle.[6] Others have investigated the role of other countries, such as the Soviet Union[7] or Britain.[8] Some scholars have addressed it from a perspective of political and international history, that is, they have focused on high-level diplomatic exchanges and connections to international experiences and developments. What derives from the focus on the diplomatic level is often a considerably less messy narrative than Chang's grassroots-inspired story about the United States mess-up of the prisoners of war issue. For instance, while Stueck diagnoses some "ill-advised UNC [United Nations Command] tactics",[9] the voluntary repatriation issue is much more orderly in his narrative.[10]

Loubere and Francheschini argue in a recent methodological intervention that a range of high-profile issues in (contemporary) China should best be looked at in light of their interconnectedness with similar issues elsewhere in the world. Identifying similar problems or wrong-doings (even crimes) in several countries does not mean, they argue, that these countries and their citizens are not allowed to criticize each other, since they themselves are guilty of the same thing ("whataboutism"), or that the wrong-doings cancel each other out. Instead, scholars should explore and critique the interconnected structures that make the problems and wrong-doings in both places possible in the first place.[11] Taking a methodological cue from this emphasis on interconnectedness, it may be useful to read Chang's China-centered take in conjunction with these international histories, as they shed

additional light on some of Chang's themes. For example, MacDonald points to the experience the United States had with prisoners of war who were repatriated to the Soviet Union after the Second World War, some of whom killed themselves in order to avoid this fate.[12] This arguably shaped the United States' stance on voluntary repatriation in the Korean War and adds nuance to the "United States mess-up" narrative. Moreover, Foot and Young show that United Nations Command soldiers that found themselves imprisoned in Chinese camps were also reindoctrinated and forced to engage in pro-Communist activities.[13] This again adds nuance to anti-Communist reindoctrination among Chinese prisoners of war. The first question I would like to pose to the author is therefore: To what extent would more consideration of this international connectedness have shed a different light on some of the issues discussed? Being mindful of the fact that even a book of proud length has a limited word count, this is meant more in the spirit of future considerations, rather than as a criticism.

In my reading, the strength of *Hijacked War* lies in its grassroots approach, which continues the tradition of scholars like Morris-Suzuki[14] and Brown,[15] who have looked at individuals' fates to make broader statements about the political landscape of the Korean War Era. But the sheer wealth of material assembled by Chang's book of course provides much more detail than these earlier article-and chapter-length works.

Discussion

This is a wonderful book, which I warmly recommend to experts on the Korean War, on the Mao Era, to military historians and to students. Of course, any reviewer will have some points of criticism, as otherwise they will not feel like they have done their job.

Some of these points are of the pedantic variety. First of all, Chang uses quite a few acronyms (CPV – Chinese People's Volunteer Army, DAC – US Department of Army Civilian, FEC – Far East Command, US, UNC – United Nations Command, etc.), which are explained in the appendix, but which make some parts of the book somewhat cumbersome to read. This, in all fairness, seems common in books on the Korean War. But a more sparing use of acronyms would have made the book more comfortable for a broader readership. Secondly, while the detailed descriptions of individuals' fates are incredibly insightful, especially in the early chapters Chang tends to focus more (though not exclusively) on those who suffered under China's socialism, while mentioning those who were pro-Communist more superficially. A more balanced treatment might have illustrated better why some prisoners of war later on became staunchly pro-Communist. However, as historians we all know that accessibility to sources is limited and that it is much easier for a reviewer to be wanting to know even more, than it is for an author to collect more information. Still, my second question to the author is to what extent this was a choice forced by the availability of sources and how a more intense discussion of enthusiastic Communists might have changed the narrative.

I think that there are many ways in which to read this book, and that different readers will take away different lessons. For Chang himself, it seems to be a book very much about the Chinese prisoners of war in the Korean War. In the conclusion, he reinforces his argument that the voluntary repatriation program was a mistake, since it prolonged the war, causing many people to die. The program was down to, not just American incompetence, but also "American policymakers' deep-rooted arrogance toward the Chinese people and their ignorance of the Chinese Communists" (p. 372). Through this, Chang reinforces a diagnosis of the unhelpful nature of United States behavior that others have explored in their discussions of voluntary repatriation as well.[16] The book is of course about this story. But to me, the title and this main argument sell the work short. What I took away from its pages was not only a story about American arrogance and incompetence. To my mind, this book was, first of all, doubtlessly about new information on the prisoners of war program, which puts into focus just why the Korean War dragged on for so long, and which was indeed down to American mismanagement.

However, secondly, to my mind the book is about more than just the Korean War. On the one hand, it is also about everyday life in the early People's Republic of China, which was, as Chang argues,

honeymoon-free. Here we see individuals helplessly at the mercy of the state or of parties and armies. Indeed, with its numerous torture scenes, the book is not for the faint of heart. In its focus on individuals, the book is in conversation with the rich and always fruitful tradition of grassroots research on the People's Republic of China.[17] But on the other hand, one striking, and very depressing, insight for me was that there barely seem to be any "good guys". The way the GMD army treated its soldiers was cruel, and it is clear why many people did not want to be drafted into it. But then the early Chinese Communist Party's reindoctrination campaigns were just as brutal, so one understands why some people wanted to defect to the United Nations Command. However in prisoner camps, freed from the power of either party, Chinese Communist Party and GMD, the prisoners of war themselves became brutal. Communists tortured anti-Communists in one compound, anti-Communists tortured Communists in another compound. The United States forced anti-Communist prisoners, that is, people who were on their side, to become secret service agents with barely any chances of survival. As Monica Kim writes in *The Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War*: "The horror, the violence, and the rapture of war distill into allegories and meditations on the nature of humankind."[18] Seeing as reflections on human nature are not necessarily the professional purview of a historian, my last question for the author is therefore simply: Would you agree with my reading of your book as being about much more than the Korean War and the prisoners of war issue? And if yes, how does your book change the story of the civil war and of the early People's Republic of China beyond the issue of the prisoners of war and the lack of a honeymoon?

In sum, this is an excellent book for a broad range of readers, which will undoubtedly inspire a lot of future research on the Korean War, prisoners of war and the early People's Republic of China.

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[1] Charles S. Young, *Name, Rank, and Serial Number: Exploiting Korean War POWs at Home and Abroad* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 80.

[2] Jeremy Brown, "From Resisting Communists to Resisting America: Civil War and Korean War in Southwest China, 1950-51," in *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People's Republic of China*, ed. Jeremy Brown and Paul Pickowicz (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), 105–29.

[3] Young, *Name, Rank, and Serial Number: Exploiting Korean War POWs at Home and Abroad*, 89–105; Rosemary Foot, *A Substitute for Victory: The Politics of Peacemaking at the Korean Armistice Talks* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 109–21.

[4] Young, *Name, Rank, and Serial Number: Exploiting Korean War POWs at Home and Abroad*, 1–2.

[5] Among these works are: Jian Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); 童庆平, "鲜为人知的'中国人民第一届赴朝慰问团'" [The little-known 'First Chinese People's Solidarity Delegation to Korea'], 党史纵横 [A review of party history], no. 2 (2011): 21–24; Xiaoming Zhang, *Red Wings over the Yalu: China, the Soviet Union, and the Air War in Korea* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002); William Whitney Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War: A New Diplomatic and Strategic History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); 邓峰, "艰难的博弈：美国、中国与朝鲜战争的结束" [A difficult game: The United States, China and the end of the Korean War], 世界历史 [World history], no. 4 (2010): 13–21; Zhihua Shen and Danhui Li, *After Leaning to One Side: China and Its Allies in the Cold War* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2011); Kenneth W. Estes, "Forgotten Warriors: The 1st Provisional Marine Brigade, the Corps Ethos, and the Korean War," *Global War Studies* 10, no. 2 (January 8, 2013): 86–88; Haruki Wada, *The Korean War: An International History* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).

[6] Monica Kim, *The Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War: The Untold History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

[7] 宋晓芹, "试析朝鲜战俘遣返谈判中的苏联因素" [Analysing the Soviet factor in the negotiations on

the repatriation of Korean [War] PoW], 世界历史 [World history], no. 2 (2011): 18–28.

[8] 徐友珍, "英国与朝鲜停战谈判中的战俘遣返问题" [Britain and the question of PoW repatriation in the armistice negotiations of the Korean War], 世界历史 [World history], no. 4 (2010): 22–31.

[9] William Whitney Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 272.

[10] Stueck, 258–65, 268–307. Similarly, see also Barton J. Bernstein, "The Struggle over the Korean Armistice: Prisoners of Repatriation?," in *Child of Conflict: The Korean-American Relationship, 1943-1953*, ed. Bruce Cumings (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983), 261–307; 任方, "论朝鲜战争停战谈判中的战俘'自愿遣返'原则" [Discussing the principle of 'Voluntary repatriation' of PoW in the armistice negotiations of the Korean War], 辽宁大学学报（哲学社会科学版） [Journal of Liaoning University （Philosophy and Social Sciences）] 39, no. 2 (March 2011): 67–72; 赵学功, "美国、中国与朝鲜停战谈判中的战俘遣返问题" [The problem of PoW repatriation in the armistice negotiations of the United States, China and North Korea], 四川大学学报(哲学社会科学版) [Journal of Sichuan University (Social Science Edition)], no. 1 (2015): 62–74; 彭凤玲, "朝鲜战争停战谈判期间美国的心理宣传行动解析" [An analysis of the United States psychological propaganda actions during the time of the armistice negotiations of the Korean War], 北方论坛 [The Northern Forum], no. 4 (2020): 114–22.

[11] Ivan Franceschini and Nicholas Loubere, *Global China as a Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022). For "whataboutism", see for example Franceschini and Loubere, 2.

[12] Callum A. MacDonald, *Korea: The War before Vietnam* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), 139.

[13] Young, *Name, Rank, and Serial Number: Exploiting Korean War POWs at Home and Abroad*; Foot, *A Substitute for Victory: The Politics of Peacemaking at the Korean Armistice Talks*, 121–24.

[14] Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "Prisoner Number 600,001: Rethinking Japan, China, and the Korean War 1950-1953," *Journal of Asian Studies* 74, no. 2 (May 2015): 411–32.

[15] Brown, "From Resisting Communists to Resisting America."

[16] For example, 彭, "朝鲜战争停战谈判期间美国的心理宣传行动解析"; 赵, "美国、中国与朝鲜停战谈判中的战俘遣返问题"; 任, "论朝鲜战争停战谈判中的战俘'自愿遣返'原则."

[17] The following is only a tiny fraction of literature of this school: Christian A. Hess, "Big Brother Is Watching: Local Sino-Soviet Relations and the Building of New Dalian, 1945-55," in *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People's Republic of China*, ed. Jeremy Brown and Paul Pickowicz (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), 160–83; Daniel Leese, *Mao Cult: Rhetoric and Ritual in China's Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Sofia Graziani, "The Case of Youth Exchanges and Interactions Between the PRC and Italy in the 1950s," *Modern Asian Studies* 51, no. 1 (January 2017): 194–226; Neil Jeffrey Diamant, *Useful Bullshit: Constitutions in Chinese Politics and Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021); Aminda M. Smith, *Thought Reform and China's Dangerous Classes: Reeducation, Resistance, and the People* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013); Edward Friedman, Paul Pickowicz, and Mark Selden, *Chinese Village, Socialist State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Erik Mueggler, *The Age of Wild Ghosts: Memory, Violence, and Place in Southwest China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Gail Hershatter, *The Gender of Memory: Rural Women and China's Collective Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

[18] Kim, *The Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War*, 2.

Response

David Cheng Chang, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

I am deeply honored to receive such a thoughtful, detailed, and engaged review of *The Hijacked War* from Elisabeth Forster. Her impressive command of the relevant literature—both in English and Chinese—on Korean War POWs and the early People's Republic of China (PRC) is evident throughout. Among the sixteen reviews my book has received, hers stands out as the most thorough and thought-provoking.

To have one's work taken seriously, read closely, and interrogated with rigor is a gift that few authors are fortunate enough to receive. I thank Dr. Forster for her careful reading and her incisive questions, which speak not only to the core themes of the book but also to its broader implications for the study of war, ideology, and the human condition.

More than the Korean War

Let me begin by acknowledging Dr. Forster's central insight: that *The Hijacked War* is about more than the Korean War. This was, in fact, one of my guiding intentions in writing the book. While the Korean War provides the historical framework, my deeper interest lies in the way individuals navigate coercive systems—be they military, ideological, or bureaucratic. The book is, at its heart, an exploration of how ordinary people make choices, endure suffering, and attempt to survive in situations where agency is severely constrained. It is about the contingent, often tragic, outcomes that result when large-scale geopolitical forces impact the lives of people who have little control over their circumstances but nonetheless strive to overcome constraints with limited information.

Dr. Forster asks whether this book offers insights into the early history of the People's Republic of China beyond the Korean War. My answer is an emphatic yes. While my primary goal is to reconstruct events with accuracy and nuance, I also believe that history at its best can illuminate enduring questions about power, ideology, and the human condition.

The early PRC, as depicted in the first three chapters of the book, was a society in transition—marked by violence, fear, hope, and ideological fervor. For many of the future POWs, this period was no "honeymoon," as Dr. Forster rightly observes. State-building was accomplished through mass mobilization, widespread coercion, ever-expanding surveillance, and the constant threat—and the pervasive use—of punishment, as exemplified by the bloody "Campaign to Suppress Counter-revolutionaries" (see Chapter 1 "Fleeing or Embracing the Communists"; Chapter 2 "Reforming Former Nationalists"; Chapter 3 "Desperados and Volunteers").

The Korean War, far from being a separate event, was both a product and an accelerator of these transformations. It was an extension of the unfinished World War II. Similarly, the mini-civil war between pro- and anti-Communist prisoners in UN camps was a continuation of the unfinished Chinese Civil War between the Chinese Communists and Nationalists. Understanding the prisoners' pre-Korean War experiences is essential to making sense of their actions and decisions in battle and captivity. While some reviewers have criticized the lengthy background chapters, noting that readers don't get to the war in Korea until page 95 and the prison camps until page 180, I believe these chapters are essential to laying the foundation for what follows.

The Hijacked War is part of a broader scholarly conversation about the nature of revolution, the mechanisms of political control, and the costs of ideological purity. I see it as complementing the work of scholars like Diana Lary, Gail Hershatter, Jeremy Brown, Aminda Smith, and others who have explored the local and individual dimensions of state power in Mao-era China. My hope is that the book will be read not only as a military or diplomatic

history, but also as a contribution to the social and political history of the early PRC.

For the past five years, I have been working on the Chinese edition of the book, which involves not just translation but substantial rewriting based on additional oral and archival materials acquired since the publication of the English edition. Rewriting the pre-Korean War chapters has proven the most complex and challenging. Keeping Dr. Forster's questions in mind, I had planned to fully address them after completing that project, but delays in the rewriting have also delayed this response. My sincere apologies to Dr. Forster for that.

Grassroots Orientation

Dr. Forster rightly emphasizes the book's grassroots orientation. I am gratified that this comes through clearly. My research has been driven by the desire to recover the voices and experiences of the Chinese POWs themselves—individuals caught in multiple vortexes of historical forces far beyond their control. They were not simply victims; they were also actors—sometimes complicit, sometimes resistant, and always complex.

Historians strive to write history from both the top down and the bottom up, but the practice proved to be difficult. Take China's WWII and Civil War for example: in Rana Mitter's *Forgotten Ally* (2013), the protagonists were the top leaders of three political factions: Chiang Kai-shek, Mao Zedong, and Wang Jingwei.[1] In *China at War* (2017), Hans van de Ven shifts the lens downward by weaving the observations of Chen Kewen, a middle-ranking official, and the experiences of Chi Pang-yuan, the daughter of a politician, into the larger narrative of war and revolution from 1937 to 1952.[2] Diana Lary's *The Chinese People at War: Human Suffering and Social Transformation, 1937–1945* (2010) employs a number of oral history interviews with both elites and peasants conducted by others and herself, but its sequel *China's Civil War: A Social History, 1945–1949* (2015) relies mostly on interviews done by others and elite recollections.[3]

The scale and depth of the oral history interviews used in *The Hijacked War* is both unprecedented and unrepeatable, as most prisoners have passed away since the interviews. The book draws on oral history interviews with more than 84 POWs across the Taiwan Strait and the Pacific Ocean, along with an interrogator and an interpreter, and from a wide range of archival sources, especially more than 1,000 prisoner interrogation records. Remarkably, among the 84 prisoner interviewees, I have located the interrogation records of 17 men and one woman. Careful comparison shows that their recent oral history accounts are highly consistent with their interrogation narratives they gave between 1950 and 1952.

I agree wholeheartedly with Dr. Forster that these micro-histories offer a powerful lens through which to view the larger dynamics of the Chinese Civil War, the Korean War, and their aftermaths.

Representational Balance

Dr. Forster also raises an important point about the representation of pro-Communist prisoners in my narrative. She notes that the book devotes more attention to those who suffered at the hands of the Communist regime than to those who embraced Communist ideology, and she asks whether this imbalance is the result of source availability or interpretive choice. In truth, it is primarily the latter. Of the 84 oral history interviewees I drew upon for the book, 29 were conducted in the PRC, 50 in Taiwan, one in the United States, and four in Argentina and Brazil (including one Chinese and three North Koreans). While the number of Taiwan-based interviewees is somewhat higher, the most in-depth, detailed, and nuanced interviews are roughly equally distributed between the mainland and Taiwan. Moreover, many former pro-Communist prisoners interviewed in the PRC were just as willing—if not more so—to speak candidly about their experiences, even when those experiences were painful or self-incriminating.

The reason anti-Communist POWs receive more narrative attention, however, lies in the disproportionate impact they had on the course and outcome of the war. Their actions are central to explaining the unexpected repatriation pattern: two-thirds of Chinese POWs ultimately went to Taiwan, while only one-third returned to the PRC. This 2:1 ratio came as a surprise to all parties involved, especially given the legal and normative

assumption—enshrined in international law—that prisoners of war would return to their home country at the conflict's end.

As the book details, a core group of approximately 3,000 diehard anti-Communist prisoners dominated over more than 10,000 fellow captives, persuading and at times coercing them to resist repatriation. They transformed the POW camps into sites of ideological struggle and physical violence. Their militant resistance to repatriation played a decisive role in deadlocking the armistice negotiations in Panmunjom. In this sense, the anti-Communist prisoners did not merely resist repatriation—they hijacked the war, altering its course.

By contrast, the motivations and actions of pro-Communist prisoners, while important, were less consequential to the broader outcome. Mistakenly believing that the United States intended to detain them indefinitely to prolong the war, they mounted fierce resistance and occasional uprisings against camp authorities. What they did not know was that their repatriation had never been contested in the Panmunjom negotiations. The 15-month deadlock centered entirely on the fate of anti-Communist prisoners. For this reason, the book devotes more space to the pre-Korean War experiences of anti-Communist leaders, in order to explain both their battlefield desertions and their later roles as organizers of anti-Communist violence within the camps.

That said, I take Dr. Forster's critique seriously. There is a real risk that, in highlighting the brutality of the Communist regime and the suffering of its opponents, the narrative may underrepresent the sincerity, conviction, and idealism of those who embraced the Communist project—particularly in the early years of the PRC, before the major political campaigns such as the Anti-Rightist Campaign, the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution. A more balanced portrayal would certainly help to illuminate the full spectrum of ideological commitments and lived experiences among Chinese POWs. This is an imbalance I acknowledge, and one I hope to address more fully in the Chinese edition.

Political and Institutional "Mess-ups"

One of the most compelling aspects of Dr. Forster's review is her attention to the theme of political and institutional "mess-ups." She accurately identifies my argument that the prolongation of the war—stemming from the stalemate over prisoner repatriation in the armistice negotiations—resulted not from high-minded ideological commitments to freedom or human rights, as some scholars have previously argued, but rather from poor planning, miscommunication, and bureaucratic inertia within the Truman-Acheson administration.

The insistence on voluntary repatriation, later touted as a moral principle, was in fact initially a bargaining chip that US negotiators were prepared to abandon. Yet, a separately conceived US policy—psychological warfare programs in UN camps—empowered anti-Communist prisoners, who came to dominate major camps and threatened violent resistance to repatriation.

As I argue in the book, the US government "became hostage to its own moralistic but ultimately hypocritical policy of voluntary repatriation and to Chinese anti-Communist prisoners." By the time senior US officials grasped the gravity of the situation, it was too late. The United States found itself "riding a tiger of its own making, from which it was impossible to dismount" (p. 12). The war agenda had effectively been hijacked by the Chinese prisoners themselves.

"there barely seem to be any 'good guys,'"

Another central theme identified by Dr. Forster is the moral ambiguity that permeates the book. She writes that "there barely seem to be any 'good guys,'" and I agree. One of the most painful realizations I came to in the course of researching the book was that cruelty was not the monopoly of any one side. The KMT's treatment of its soldiers was harsh and often inhumane. The CCP's reindoctrination campaigns were coercive and psychologically stifling. The United Nations Command, despite its claims to moral superiority, allowed and even encouraged anti-Communist prisoners to terrorize their fellow captives. And within the camps themselves,

prisoners became tormentors, turning on one another with astonishing brutality.

As Dr. Forster notes, Li Da'an—who begins the story as a victim of Communist repression—later emerges as one of the most ruthless enforcers of anti-Communist violence in the camps. In the end, however, he was drafted by US Army special operations and parachuted into North Korea, where he was captured and later executed in Beijing. Li's fellow prisoner-agent Hou Guangming remarked, "I used to have a great impression of the Americans……Once I came into close contact with them, however, I found them unscrupulous and brutal." Gao Wenjun concluded, "Sometimes we hated the Americans even more than Mao and the Communists. They were the same. They had no humanity, no feelings. They just forced us to die for them" (p. 356). Li's story is emblematic of the way war deforms the moral compass of all belligerents.
The fact that "there barely seem to be any 'good guys'" in this book sometimes led readers to ask me, "which side are you on?" My answer is simple: I am not on the side of the any government; I am on the side of facts and of the common soldier.

International Interconnectedness

Dr. Forster challenges me to consider how a greater emphasis on international interconnectedness—particularly the memory of Soviet POW repatriations after World War II—might have nuanced my account of American decision-making. I find this suggestion valuable. There is indeed a longer history of repatriation policies and their unintended consequences that shaped Cold War thinking. The American memory of Soviet returnees who chose suicide over forced repatriation undoubtedly influenced some policy-makers, especially Charles Bohlen, even if it was ultimately outweighed by other geopolitical considerations.

Furthermore, works such as those by Callum A. MacDonald, Tessa Morris-Suzuki, Monica Kim, Sherzod Muminov, and others provide useful comparative frameworks that could add depth to the analysis.[4] I see this not as a correction, but as a fruitful avenue for future research—one that I hope other scholars will pursue.

Meditation on Human Nature

Quoting Monica Kim's reflection that "[t]he horror, the violence, and the rapture of war distill into allegories and meditations on the nature of humankind," Dr. Forster asks whether I see the book as a meditation on human nature.[5] While some of my interviewees, especially Zhang Zeshi (1929–2021), have themselves grappled with the dark side of human nature in their writings, I agree with Forster that "reflections on human nature are not necessarily the professional purview of a historian." And I must admit that I am not well equipped to offer philosophical reflections on the subject.

Stylistic Critique

Before closing, I would like to respond briefly to Dr. Forster's stylistic critique: the use of acronyms. This is a fair point. In attempting to reduce word count for an already lengthy book, I may have relied too heavily on abbreviations. While the appendix provides an explanatory key, I appreciate that this can impede readability, especially for non-specialists. In future work, I will strive for greater clarity and accessibility.

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In sum, I am deeply grateful to Dr. Forster for her generous and intellectually stimulating review. Her questions have prompted me to reflect more deeply on my own work and to consider new directions for future research. Most importantly, her review affirms the value of scholarly dialogue—the kind that challenges, refines, and extends our understanding. I look forward to continuing this conversation with her and with others in the field.

[1] Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally: China's World War II, 1937–1945* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013).
[2] Hans van de Ven, *China at War: Triumph And Tragedy in the Emergence of the New China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).
[3] Diana Lary, *The Chinese People at War: Human Suffering and Social Transformation, 1937–1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Diana Lary, *China's Civil War: A Social History, 1945–1949* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
[4] Callum A. MacDonald, *Korea: The War before Vietnam* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986); Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "Prisoner Number 600,001: Rethinking Japan, China, and the Korean War 1950-1953," *Journal of Asian Studies* 74, no. 2 (May 2015): 411–32; Monica Kim, *The Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); Sherzod Muminov, *Eleven Winters of Discontent: The Siberian Internment and the Making of a New Japan* (Harvard University Press, 2022).
[5] Kim, *The Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War*, p. 2.