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Franco David Macri, *Clash of Empires in South China: The Allied Nations' Proxy War with Japan, 1935-1941*. Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 2012. Pp. xiii, 465. ISBN 978-0-7006-1877-4.

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Franco David Macri (Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, Hickam AFB, Hawaii) offers a new study of the origins of the Second World War, focusing on the underappreciated significance of southern China for Allied grand strategy. The author (PhD, Univ. of Hong Kong) weaves together a detailed analysis of the military events of the Second Sino-Japanese War with the complex, shifting diplomatic relations among Great Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union, Canada, and China up to 1941. His account centers on the British colony of Hong Kong, the focal point for sustaining Chinese resistance.

The expansion of the Second Sino-Japanese War after 1937 witnessed an increased role for South China, owing to expanded international military and economic aid. Except for the Soviet route via Xinjiang, the main foreign supply routes terminated in southern China, making it fundamentally important to all parties. These routes included the Burma Road, the French Indochina railway, and sea lanes to the British port of Hong Kong, which was linked to the Hunan-Guangdong railroad after 1936. To sever these lines of communication and force Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek to negotiate, Japanese forces launched a series of attacks against Guangdong, Hainan Island, Guangxi, and Hunan starting in 1938.

Macri argues that the Japanese invasion of Hainan Island in February 1939 had the unintended and inexorable consequence of enlarging the conflict and encouraging foreign support for the Chinese.

The assault on the island was initially executed to extend the range of Japanese airpower over Chinese lines of supply in Kwangsi; it was not intended as a preparatory element of an advance farther southward, but it did encourage such a move. Once the Japanese were established in the region, the temptation to occupy Indochina grew larger, as such an action became easier to support by air from the newly developed bases in Hainan. In this sense, the invasion of Hainan was a direct threat to the Western powers and provoked an unwelcome diplomatic reaction that resulted in strengthened Chinese ties to the West. But the invasion was also a failure because the movement of military supplies from Hong Kong was never significantly interrupted. (111)

Macri contends that increased Anglo-Japanese tensions suited Chiang Kai-shek's strategic vision. To cut the Hong Kong supply link to the rich Hunan province, Japanese forces occupied Canton (Guangzhou) in late 1938. Chiang's 12th Group Army, under Gen. Yu Hanmou, gave only token resistance before retreating along the Hunan-Guangdong railway into northern Guangdong province. Canton and its vicinity saw persistent fighting and supplies "continued to be sent into China directly from Hong Kong" (105). Low-level clashes and Japanese annoyance with British efforts to support China led to violent skirmishes around Hong Kong and, with each new incident, played into Chiang's desires to secure active allies from abroad.

As Chiang sought outside support, the Western powers and the Soviet Union found the proxy war in China beneficial for their own purposes. Helping to keep Japanese forces militarily preoccupied with China freed Britain and the USSR to concentrate on more pressing threats in Europe. As its allies provided China with munitions, supplies, and loans, the railway from Changsha to Guangdong and the port at Hong Kong became "the most important strategic objectives for keeping the Chinese army alive" (124). Allied military and economic aid enabled the Chinese to maintain a protracted stalemate.

A major, very intriguing component of Macri's study is his treatment of Canada's critical role in the emerging Anglo-American cooperation in assisting China. He argues that Canada's foreign policy shifted away from Great Britain and into alignment with the United States. After the fall of France, Canada became "the linchpin in forging a transatlantic alliance" (208). As Anglo-American policy in Asia coalesced, fears that China might conclude a separate peace with Japan also mounted. Some concrete show of Allied support was necessary. To that end, two battalions of Canadian troops were sent to reinforce the colony in November

1941. Though “C Force” did not appreciably improve Hong Kong’s defensive resources, it did “demonstrate Allied solidarity and commitment to China” (273). Macri rejects the view that C Force’s deployment sacrificed Canadian troops to preserve British imperial holdings<sup>1</sup> or simply to deter Japanese aggression.<sup>2</sup> Based on American, British, and Canadian archival sources, he asserts that C-Force was the best way for Allied leaders to take some pressure off the Soviet Union after the German invasion in 1941; Canadian efforts followed US foreign policy. Thus, the reinforcement of Hong Kong exerted a wider geopolitical influence in linking British, American, Soviet, and Canadian strategy. “Western political leaders were less concerned about aiding their Chinese allies than about supporting the USSR, and the net result of Allied efforts was to protect Stalin in the Soviet Far East. The application of collective security doctrine at Hong Kong ultimately did not provide any useful deterrence against Japanese aggression south; instead it produced the opposite effect by helping to ignite the Pacific war” (285).

Macri concludes by describing the fall of Hong Kong and the critical battles for Changsha, Hunan, as elements of the same campaign. In December 1941, Japanese forces overran the Hong Kong defenders, including C Force, in three weeks and launched another assault against Changsha. Chinese efforts to relieve Hong Kong were delayed, then abandoned, owing in part to a lack of British military assistance. The rapid collapse of Chinese resistance at Canton in 1938 soured British (and others’) opinion of Chinese fighting ability. To his credit, Macri carefully explains that, during the second and third battles for Changsha, some Chinese Army units showed themselves capable of effective defensive operations. The third battle, the only Allied victory in the early months of the Pacific War, significantly boosted Chinese morale.

A special strength of *Clash of Empires* is the extensive research Macri conducted in British and American archives to shed light on military and diplomatic facets of a complex story. He astutely draws on evidence from officials working in China and lower-ranking functionaries in London and Washington—“Anglo-American policy in Asia during this period tended to be formulated and driven by such officials” (13). Canadian archival and missionary accounts usefully balance those of British and American civilian and military officials. However, the lack of Chinese- and Japanese-language materials is damaging when Macri speculates about the intentions of Asian commanders based solely on reports by Western observers. Such observers may or may not have correctly deduced their counterparts’ motives.

Also unpersuasive is Macri’s belief that the decision to reinforce Hong Kong was “unnecessary and ignoble” because it entailed supporting a morally repugnant Soviet regime, deceived the public regarding its true purpose, and “failed to provide for long-term global security” (15). This underestimates Japan’s culpability in escalating the conflict and Anglo-American desires to provide some tangible assistance to an imperiled and necessary ally. Furthermore, to admit that reinforcing Hong Kong was meant primarily to help the USSR would have strained the prickly alliance with Chiang Kai-shek.

The provision of many detailed maps integrated throughout the book is to be commended; they provide broad geographical orientation and clarify the location of vital supply lines as well as details of campaigns and battles. For example, the crucial third battle of Changsha is illustrated by three maps that convey the fluid nature of the engagement, the role of terrain, and the tactics of the successful Chinese counterattack. A minor defect in the book is the inconsistent transliteration of Chinese names and words.

*Clash of Empires* will appeal particularly to readers interested in the military campaigns of the Second Sino-Japanese War in southern China from 1937 through 1941 and the associated international maneuvering. Macri’s clear and engaging prose will make the book accessible to both undergraduates and general readers. And, too, its exhaustive use of Western-language archival materials offers much that is new even for scholars familiar with the subject.

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1. Brereton Greenhous, *“C” Force to Hong Kong: A Canadian Catastrophe, 1941–1945* (Toronto: Dundurn Pr, 1997).

2. Douglas Ford, *Britain’s Secret War against Japan, 1937–1945* (NY: Routledge, 2006), and Kent Fedorowich, “Cocked Hats and Swords and Small, Little Garrisons’: Britain, Canada and the Fall of Hong Kong, 1941,” *Modern Asian Studies* 37.1 (2003) 111–57.