

<b>Institution:</b> University of Oxford		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 28 – History		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Public and Policy Understanding of Modern China and Chinese Nationalism		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2004-2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Rana Mitter	Professor of the History and Politics of Modern China	2001-present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> January 2014-December 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Mitter's research has transformed public and policy understanding of modern China and Chinese nationalism by linking China's long-term political history to its current geopolitical relations with other states, including the United Kingdom. His work has enhanced understanding of China's significance to the UK through broadcast and print media in the UK and beyond. His radio documentaries have reached hundreds of thousands of listeners. Mitter's work has also shaped future strategies for UK and international policy think tanks, and benefitted UK government policy-making including the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the No 10 Policy Unit.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Mitter's research has had a transformative impact upon understanding of the emergence of nationalism in modern China, both in the early twentieth century and in the present era [R1, R2, R3]. In particular he has addressed China's role in World War II (1937- 45) and its significance to the shaping of contemporary Chinese nationalism. His research has explored the way that Britain, the USA and China functioned as allies in the Second World War during the Nationalist era. The ensuing Civil War and victory of the Chinese Communist Party meant that the legacy of that conflict, and interpretations of China's role in it, are expressed and contested in a variety of ways in China today. These range from Chinese claims to territory in Asia, based on the settlement of 1945, to nationalistic cultural and media products (books, TV, games, films). Mitter's award-winning book <i>China's War with Japan</i> [R2] provided a comprehensive history, largely through Chinese sources, of China's experience of fighting Japan during World War II. His most recent book is based on several years of research that underpins the impact described in this case study. <i>China's Good War: How World War II is Shaping a New Nationalism</i> [R3] argues that China's reassessment of the World War II years is central to its newfound confidence abroad and to mounting nationalism at home. This project has also resulted in several journal publications and chapters in edited collections [R4, R5, R6].</p>		
<p><b>3. References to the research</b> (indicative maximum of six references)</p> <p><b>R1.</b> [Authored Book, available on request] R. Mitter, <i>A Bitter Revolution: China's Struggle with the Modern World</i> (Oxford 2005). ISBN 9780192806055.</p> <p><b>R2.</b> [Authored Book, available on request] R. Mitter, <i>China's War with Japan, 1937-45: The Struggle for Survival</i> (Allen Lane, June 2013). ISBN 9781846140105.</p> <p><b>R3.</b> [Authored Book, listed in REF2] R. Mitter, <i>China's Good War: How World War II is Shaping a New Nationalism</i> (Harvard University Press, 2020). ISBN 9780674984264.</p> <p><b>R4.</b> [Chapter, available on request] R. Mitter, 'Identities and Alliances: China's Place in the World after Pearl Harbor, 1941–1945', in B. Bailey and D. Farber (eds.), <i>Beyond Pearl Harbor: A Pacific history</i> (University of Kansas Press, 2019), pp. 102-120. ISBN 9780700628148.</p>		

**R5.** [Journal Article, listed in REF2] R. Mitter 'Statebuilding after Disaster: Jiang Tingfu and the Reconstruction of Post-World War II China, 1943-49', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 61(1): (2018), pp. 176-206. DOI: [10.1017/S0010417518000531](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000531)

**R6.** [Chapter] R. Mitter 'Nationalism, Decolonization, Geopolitics and the Asian Post-War', in Michael Geyer and Adam Tooze (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Second World War. Volume III, Total War: Economy, Society and Culture* (3 vols., Cambridge, 2015), pp. 599-622. DOI: [10.1017/CHO9781139626859.026](https://doi.org/10.1017/CHO9781139626859.026)

#### Awards

R2 was named as a 2013 Book of the Year by the *Financial Times* and the *Economist*, was named a 2014 CHOICE Outstanding Academic Title, and won the 2014 RUSI/Duke of Westminster's Medal for Military Literature.

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

##### (i) Transforming public understanding of China's History: Radio and Film

In 2018, Mitter presented his research in a 20-part series on Chinese history, *Chinese Characters*, on **BBC Radio 4**. The series drew on his books *China's War with Japan* [R2] and *A Bitter Revolution* [R1], in particular the episodes relating to figures such as Chiang Kai-shek, Deng Xiaoping, Wang Jingwei, Mao Zedong, the writers Ding Ling and Lu Xun, and the authors of the controversial television series *River Elegy* which was shown a year before the Tiananmen Square killings of 1989. The BBC's Head of Radio Current Affairs notes that Mitter 'pursued an engaging and accessible approach to draw in a large, mainstream audience for a deeper understanding of the forces that have shaped China – translating his academic expertise into vivid broadcasting in a flagship slot on the nation's biggest speech and news radio network, alongside further listening offline on BBC Sounds'. [E1.1] Mitter was subsequently named Best Presenter at the 2019 Eastern Eye ACTA (Arts, Culture and Theatre) awards for the series. The series contributed to a wider understanding of Chinese history for a general audience, as demonstrated by comments submitted to BBC audience feedback, including: 'exceptional content', 'wonderful programme', 'superb radio'. [E1.2] Since Chinese history is rarely addressed in British public media, this feedback demonstrates a genuine appreciation of the way that public understanding was deepened by exposure over an extended time to the history of an immensely important country that is little understood in the UK. [Text removed for publication].

Mitter has also presented his research for wider audiences in a series of further documentaries for BBC radio, including *Shanghai: World City Redux* (Radio 3, 2014; selected for *Pick of the Week* on Radio 4), *Japan's Never-Ending War* (Radio 3 and BBC World TV, 2018), and *Meanwhile in Beijing* (Radio 4, 2020; rated 5 stars by the *Times* radio critic); these all drew on work from *A Bitter Revolution* and *China's War with Japan* to explain to the public the importance of the recent past (early 20<sup>th</sup> century) in explaining China's current trajectory. All were presented and co-written by Mitter. The producer notes the improvement to listeners' understanding of China: 'As a documentary-maker at BBC Radio, I have made several programmes in recent years which have relied heavily on Professor Mitter's research in modern Chinese history... These programmes drew on his research and expertise, including his work with Mandarin archival sources, and his first-hand knowledge of Chinese intellectual life and culture, as shaped by its modern history. This has provided our listeners with the opportunity to access deeper and more nuanced perspectives on China than are possible in the absence of this level of expertise.' [E2.1] The Producer has also supplied the following rounded listener figures for Mitter's documentaries: [E2.2]

*Shanghai World City Redux* (2014, duration 44 mins). Reach: 97,300; (repeat) 102,300.

*Japan's Never-Ending War* (2018, duration 44 mins). Reach: 61,300.

*Meanwhile in Beijing* (2020, duration 28 mins). Reach: 318,700.

Mitter's two-part television documentary *China's Forgotten War* (2015), produced by **InFocus Asia**, explored the significance of World War II in shaping contemporary Chinese nationalism. The show drew heavily on R2, including on-screen readings by Mitter as presenter, who also edited and adapted the shooting script. In 2019, the popular site *History Hit* made it the

'standout documentary' of their East Meets West season and recorded an interview with Mitter, now available online. [E3.1]

The significance of the Impact can be demonstrated by reactions online, which include this statement:

I would consider myself a WWII educated person ... But why have I never explored this aspect? It's not talked about as much and that is a shame. What happened in Nanjing by the Japanese was every bit as horrifying and history needs to be explained in full disclosure not bits and pieces. ... WWII started in China in 1937 not in Poland 1939, I am going to have to ingrain that in my head from now on.

Amazon Reviewer, United States, 3 May 2018. [E3.2]

Another viewer, this time on IMDB, recorded:

you would have thunked [that] an American who ... really thought they knew most of WWII history has seen it all. Nope! ... You cannot help but feel the pain suffered by the Chinese from this film. ... It fills in the missing pieces[.]

IDMB reviewer, 6 May 2019. [E3.2]

The documentary has now been distributed through Amazon, HistoryHit TV, PBS America and has 284,000 downloads on YouTube. [E3.1]

## (ii) Transforming public understanding of China's History: influencing curatorial decisions in the museum sector

Mitter's research findings have benefitted curatorial practice in prominent international museums. In 2021 the **Imperial War Museum (IWM)** will open a new Second World War gallery with the aim of positioning Britain and its Empire within a broader, global context, appropriate for twenty-first century visitors. A significant part of this broader international narrative concerns China's contribution to the Second World War, which will be a major feature of the museum for the first time. As an Associate of the Imperial War Museum, Mitter's research was used in the labelling and procurement of materials for the new China element of the World War II galleries. This work has included close liaison via email as well as visits to each other's institutions, providing links with the historical archives in Chongqing, China, which sourced artefacts and memorabilia from China during World War II. The Curator explains how the reframing of the war as a global struggle has been underpinned by Mitter's research:

Professor Mitter's book [*China's War with Japan*] ... and his research in modern Chinese history has been an essential resource ... [and] key events in the book ... influenced the narrative structure and content of the galleries. Most significantly, that the gallery narrative should begin in 1937 ... In addition ... we will emphasise that China had been fighting Japan for several years before Britain and America declared war against Japan, a fact which is not universally known by our audiences.

The Curator adds that Mitter's text reviews of the gallery have ensured that 'visitors will receive an authoritative and rigorous explanation of historical events'. [E4]

The American equivalent of the IWM is the **National World War II Museum in New Orleans, Louisiana**; here, too, Mitter's book, *China's War with Japan* (US title: *Forgotten Ally: China's World War II, 1937-1945*), was used directly to underpin the text accompanying the displays and descriptions. The Director of Conferences and Symposia at the museum's Institute for the Study of War and Democracy discovered Mitter's work while organising an international conference in 2013, and invited Mitter to address the attendees (almost 500). This event proved to be the springboard for Mitter's involvement in the redesigning of the museum's displays to include China's contribution to the war:

His book, *Forgotten Ally: China's World War II, 1937-1945* was published right as the Museum began to work on designing and constructing its 'Road to Tokyo' permanent exhibition. Professor Mitter's research in modern Chinese history was influential in our putting America's WWII role in a much broader, and better, global context, which had not previously been a major feature of the museum, and has helped us enlighten our nearly 800,000 annual visitors. [E5]

The museum subsequently invited Mitter to serve as an Instructor for their Summer Teacher Institute, which brings 30 history teachers from US high schools – chosen in competition – to study new findings in historical research. These Institute participants are then designated ‘master teachers’ who return to their respective districts and share what they have learned with another 30 additional teachers each. [E5]

### (iii) Contributing to policy debate

Mitter’s research on Chinese nationalism has led to numerous invitations to speak at major UK think tanks, including Ditchley Park, Wilton Park, Chatham House, and the Royal United Services Institute: [Text removed for publication]. In all of these settings, he has stressed the importance of bringing historical understanding to interpreting contemporary China and has had an impact on the development of their policy frameworks. [Text removed for publication]. In summer 2020, Mitter drew on his historical research when he co-authored the report ‘Strategic Approach to UK-China relations’ (approximately 60,000 words) with the Director of the British Foreign Policy Group (BFPG) [E12]. The latter notes that the Group’s partnership with Mitter ‘undoubtedly elevated the reach and influence of the report’s conclusions. ... It was a highly productive collaboration, which was able to reach into the heart of government, the media, and other institutions.’ [E7] There has been well-attended follow-up on the report in public online meetings, including one hosted by the BFPG itself with commentary from Tom Tugendhat MP, Chair of the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (8 September 2020) and one hosted by the FCO-linked Great Britain China Centre (23 September 2020), attended by parliamentarians and policymakers.

The contributions in section 2 have led to further direct input into discussions in government. Mitter’s historical research on Chinese nationalism has contributed to UK government thinking and policy on China over the entire period of assessment. His research for *China’s War with Japan* was specifically recognized in terms of its relevance to the UK government as the joint winner of the ‘Frontiers of Knowledge’ competition organized by HEFCE/All-Party Parliamentary University Group in 2013. There were 185 submissions in total, and Mitter was the only academic from the humanities to be invited to lecture in the House of Lords. The call for proposals stated that ‘The lectures will give researchers a unique opportunity to present their ideas to key policymakers and engage directly with a large number of parliamentarians, and so influence public policy debates’; research was sought which was ‘Relevant to understanding a topical policy issue.’ [E8]

### (iv) Influencing UK government policy and advising government staff

Mitter contributed to discussions on China for the Integrated Review of British foreign and defence policy conducted in 2020.

[Text removed for publication]

Regular invitations to lead FCO seminars and briefings have enabled Mitter to share his insight on links between history and nationalism with UK officials. [Text removed for publication].

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

- E1.** Emails relating to *Chinese Characters* from Head of Radio Current Affairs, BBC: [Text removed for publication].
- E2.** Emails relating to various radio documentaries from Producer, BBC Radio: **E2.1.** Email (27/11/2020) containing impact statement; **E2.2.** Email (03/12/2020) containing audience figures.
- E3.** Screenshots of distribution platforms and reviews of *China’s Forgotten War*: **E3.1.** Distribution platforms: Amazon.co.uk, HistoryHit TV, PBS America, YouTube (showing viewing figures); **E3.2.** Reviews: Amazon.com, IMDB.
- E4.** Letter from Curator, Second World War Regeneration Project, Imperial War Museums London, 27/11/2020.

- E5.** Letter from Director of Conferences and Symposia, The Institute for the Study of War and Democracy at The National World War II Museum, New Orleans, 20/01/2021.
- E6.** [Text removed for publication].
- E7.** Emailed statement from Director, British Foreign Policy Group, 01/12/2020.
- E8.** Details of Call for proposals for 'Frontiers of Knowledge' and subsequent lecture given by Mitter; **E8.1** Call for proposals by the Council of the All-Party Parliamentary University Group for 'Frontiers of Knowledge: Celebrating British research', confirming that researchers invited to lecture were selected in part on the basis of the relevance of their research to understanding topical policy issues. **E8.2** Details of lecture given by Mitter on 19/03/2014.
- E9.** [Text removed for publication].
- E10.** [Text removed for publication].
- E11.** [Text removed for publication].
- E12.** BFPG report July 2020, available at <https://bfpg.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/BFPG-Report-July-2020-FINAL-4.pdf>