

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Establishing the Ramgarh Training Center: The Burma Campaign, the Colonial Internment Camp, and the Wartime Sino-British Relations

Yin Cao\*

Department of History, Tsinghua University

\*Corresponding author. E-mail: [cao\\_yin50@u.nus.edu](mailto:cao_yin50@u.nus.edu)

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## Abstract

This article investigates how the Chinese Expeditionary Force joined the Burma Campaign and retreated to India in 1942, and how the Chinese, American, and British authorities negotiated to determine the destiny of Chinese forces in India. This article argues that the choice of Ramgarh, a small town in northeast India, as the site of a training centre for the Chinese Expeditionary Force sheds light on a decades-long programme of colonial internment-camp building in British India, and illuminates the difficult relationship between Chinese and British authorities during World War II. In doing so, it also argues that the historiography of China's War of Resistance requires Southeast and South Asian perspectives.

**Keywords:** World War II; The Chinese Expeditionary Force; British India; Burma Campaign

The Chinese Expeditionary Force Training Center in Ramgarh was one of China's largest overseas military bases during the twentieth century. Located in the mountains of India's Jharkhand state (in the 1940s, Jharkhand was a part of Bihar state in eastern India), the Ramgarh Training Center in the town of Ramgarh produced more than 60,000 well-trained and modern-equipped Chinese soldiers, who contributed to the Allied victory in Southeast Asia and China during World War II. The Chinese wartime military experience in Southeast and South Asia, however, has rarely been discussed in detail. In what context was the Chinese Expeditionary Force (CEF) brought to India from Burma? Why did the Allies choose Ramgarh as a place to accommodate and train Chinese soldiers? How was Ramgarh turned into a military training centre? This article contends that the historiography of the Chinese military experience in World War II has been contained for too long within Eurocentric or Sinocentric paradigms. Using as a case study the CEF retreat from Burma to India and the establishment of the military training centre in Ramgarh, this study shows how Southeast and South Asian perspectives can provide a transregional understanding of China's War of Resistance.

Since the 2000s, a large number of literary works, TV series, and documentaries about the CEF experience have been produced in China.<sup>1</sup> Most of these productions share a similar storyline: (1) Betrayed by the British, the CEF was initially defeated by the Japanese in Burma before (2) suffering greatly during their retreat, (3) being rejuvenated in India through intensive training and access to modern equipment, (4) and ultimately reconquering Burma. By highlighting the sacrifice, bravery, patience, passion, and patriotism of Chinese soldiers in foreign lands, the narrative framework of these popular works has echoed the rising chorus of Chinese nationalism in recent decades.

<sup>1</sup>A brief search of the National Library China website indicates that more than 100 literary works related to the CEF have been published in Chinese since 1990. *Zhongguo yuanzhengjun* (The Chinese Expeditionary Force), a 56-episode TV series released in 2012 and *Wode tuanzhang wodetuan* (My Chief and My Regiment), a 43-episode TV series released in 2009 were well received by Chinese audiences. In addition, the Chinese state television broadcaster CCTV released a 12-episode documentary, *Zhongguo yuanzhengjun* (The Chinese Expeditionary Force), in 2010, generating further public interest in the history of the CEF.

Given great public interest in the CEF story, it is surprising to find so little serious scholarship on this topic. Research carried out by Chinese scholars has been restricted to elite politics and military history; it has mainly investigated why the Chinese Nationalist government sent troops to Burma and the CEF contribution to the Allied victory during World War II (Chen 2004; Fan 1996; Fang 2004; Han 2012; Li 2013; Song 2011; Wang 2002, 2016). Western scholars, whose Eurocentric views have led to bias on this issue, have had limited access to Chinese archives. They have therefore focused on the American/British war effort in the China-Burma-India theatre, while downplaying (if not outright ignoring) the role of the CEF (Dunlop 2007; Marston 2003; McLynn 2011; Slim 1951; Wheeler 2015).<sup>2</sup>

The underdeveloped state of CEF scholarship contrasts with the recent paradigm change in studies of the War of Resistance. During the past two decades, a growing trend has emerged among historians: thinking outside the paradigm of political and military historiography when analysing the War of Resistance. Historians have argued that the War of Resistance was not characterised exclusively by enemy atrocities, civilian sufferings, resilience, and heroic actions, but also by other ways of responding to the war, including desertion, collaboration, and smuggling (Barnes 2018; Thai 2018; Gong 2012; Wang 2010; Parks 2003; Barret and Shyu 2001; Fu 1993). To fully make sense of the wartime experience and individual choices, it is important to take both local and transnational perspectives into consideration.

Although a large number of memoirs and interviews with CEF veterans have made it possible to partly reconstruct contemporary local and personal contexts (Bai 2013; Ge 1995; Huang 2007; Li 1993; Yao 2005; Zhang 2016; Zhou 2015; Zhu 2014;), all of these works emphasise China's victory. Alternative responses to the war have rarely been expressed or made public. Worse still, most of the memoirs and interviews have been used to reproduce, justify, or strengthen the nationalist rhetoric in CEF narratives, rather than being analysed objectively by scholars. This nationalist interpretation has prevented scholars from adopting a transnational perspective or approaching transnational primary sources. Most studies have focused exclusively on the activities of Chinese soldiers, while largely ignoring the environment and specific context in which those soldiers fought, lived, and underwent training.

One way to rescue CEF studies from the predominance of national historiography is to contextualise the CEF experience against the socio-political backdrop of British colonialism in Southeast and South Asia in the 1940s. Very few scholars have investigated the origins of the CEF Ramgarh Training Centre, within the broader British colonial context. As few attempts have been made to incorporate British, American, Indian, and Chinese documents into a single research study, we do not know how the British authorities responded to the arrival in India of the CEF from Burma. It is not known why the British authorities agreed to allow the Americans to train Chinese soldiers in India, or why the CEF was accommodated in Ramgarh. This article aims to answer such questions using multinational primary sources; it also provides a template to help future scholars transcend the limitations of national history.

### Relocating the CEF from Burma to India

In early 1942, the British colonies in Southeast Asia were under attack from Japan. In just a few months, Hong Kong, Malaya, and Singapore were occupied by the Japanese. The Burma Road, used by the Allies to supply materials to the Chinese Nationalist government in Chongqing, was also in danger. Fearing a Japanese invasion of Burma, which would cut off the Burma Road supply line, the Chinese Nationalist government decided to establish the CEF in January 1942 to assist in defending Burma.<sup>3</sup> As the Japanese launched the Burma Campaign during the same month, the Chinese Fifth, Sixth, and Sixty-six Armies, totalling around 100,000 soldiers, entered Burma to join the fight (AH, 3 February 1942).

In March 1942, the situation in Burma deteriorated dramatically. According to Hans van de Ven, the lack of an adequate air force was critical to the collapse of the Allied defence. In addition, mutual suspicion between the British and Chinese commanding officers and serious logistical problems on the Nationalist side were major factors, which eventually contributed to the Allied defeat in Burma (Ven

<sup>2</sup>The exception is Alan Lathrop's article on the employment of Chinese Nationalist troops in the Burma Campaign; see Lathrop 1981.

<sup>3</sup>Hans van de Ven argues that the Burma Campaign was a surprise to the Japanese, Chinese, Americans, and British, as no country initially expected Burma to become a key Southeast Asian battlefield. Burma did not become a serious target for the Japanese until February 1942 when they discovered that they could occupy Rangoon with no difficulty, see Ven 2003: 23.

2003: 28–29). As large cities, including Rangoon and Mandalay, and most of the country's airfields fell into the hands of the Japanese, the collapse of the defensive line was all but inevitable.

In April 1942, when the Allies began to withdraw their troops from Burma, British forces made their way back to India, with heavy casualties and scant equipment, through the eastern Indian state of Manipur. The CEF retreat was more complex than the British retreat. Part of the CEF, which remained on the China-Burma border, retreated to Yunnan in early May (AH, 28 April 1942). Most of the CEF, however, was trapped in northern Burma. Since the Burma Road connecting Burma and China was blocked, the CEF had travel by one of two routes to avoid being captured and exterminated by the Japanese: through the mountainous areas of northern Burma to China, or into British India.

Chiang Kai-shek, the leader of the Chinese Nationalist government, had long been uncomfortable with British imperialism; he blamed the failure of the Allies in Burma on British selfishness.<sup>4</sup> Worried that the British in India would control and manipulate the CEF, Chiang Kai-shek ordered the CEF to retreat to China through the Kachin Hills, a mountainous area of northwest Burma (AH, 22 May 1942). The route through the Kachin Hills, however, proved to be disastrous. More than half of the CEF soldiers perished in the jungle, due to inadequate supplies (AH, 16 May 1942).

Understanding this risk, the New 38<sup>th</sup> Division of the CEF led by General Sun Liren defied Chiang Kai-shek's order to travel through the Kachin Hills. While stationed in Bhamo, northern Burma to cover the retreat of other CEF units, Sun Liren realised that the original retreat plan was impractical and dangerous. To save his own unit, he led his troops westward into British India, arriving in Imphal on 25 May 1942 (AH, 26 May 1942). To justify his defiance of the order, Sun Liren sent a telegraph message to Chiang Kai-shek to say that the retreat route into the Kachin Hills had been blocked by the Japanese, forcing Sun Liren to move his unit into India (AH, 22 May 1942).

Chiang Kai-shek took no action against Sun Liren for defying the order, as he himself acknowledged that the cost of retreating through the Kachin Hills was too high. In fact, Chiang had asked the CEF commander, General Luo Zhuoying, to find some local guides to help him leave the jungle and retreat to India, from where he could later return to China (AH, 18 May 1942). In late May, Chiang asked another CEF commander, General Du Yuming, to bring his troops to India for supplies (AH, 27 May 1942).

The British reaction to the CEF's arrival in India was rather ambiguous. While they needed more troops to defend India from a possible Japanese invasion, they did not believe that the poorly equipped and disheartened CEF could provide substantial support. The British transported Sun Liren's New 38<sup>th</sup> Division from Imphal to Ledo to defend local airfields (AH, 5 June 1942). In Ledo, however, Sun Liren was frustrated by the woeful conditions and the treatment his division received. Chinese soldiers were accommodated in temporary tents with limited supplies and exposed to hot, humid weather (AH, 13 June 1942). Sun Liren complained that the British did not have adequate resources or confidence to defend Ledo; they might therefore betray the Chinese troops, as had previously happened in Burma. In a telegraph message, Sun Liren urged Chiang Kai-shek to bring the CEF in India back to China as soon as possible (AH, 10 June 1942).

With the Burma Campaign ongoing, the Americans considered training the Chinese troops in India. General Joseph Stilwell, the Allied commander in the China-Burma-India (CBI) theatre, attributed the CEF's weak performance to the inefficiency, despotism, and corruption of Chinese commanding officers. Stilwell insisted that American-trained and equipped Chinese troops would be of great use in future campaigns against the Japanese in the CBI theatre (White 1991: 77). The US government welcomed Stilwell's offer to train Chinese soldiers in India for future campaigns in Southeast Asia; it would assure the American public that their government was seriously engaging with the Japanese, while costing very little (Ven 2003: 35).

In May 1942, Stilwell formally informed Chiang Kai-shek that the US government wanted to provide equipment and resources, through the Lend-Lease Act, to train Chinese troops in India (AH, 3 May 1942). Chiang Kai-shek responded enthusiastically to this proposal and agreed to send 100,000 soldiers to India. Allowing these modernised troops to be deployed to fight the Japanese would strengthen his rule in post-war China (AH, 6 May 1942). This plan, however, was temporarily shelved when the Japanese conquered Burma and cut off the Burma Road.

<sup>4</sup>For a discussion of Chiang Kai-shek's perception of British colonialism, see Shai 1980; Bickers 2016.

Stilwell did not give up on his plan to train Chinese troops. When he learned that some CEF units had arrived in India, he sent agents to inspect their condition and helped to arrange supplies for the Chinese soldiers (AH, 4 June 1942). In June 1942, Stilwell succeeded in persuading Chiang Kai-shek to allow the CEF units stay in India to recuperate and receive American training and equipment. For Chiang Kai-shek, handing over Chinese troops in India to Stilwell was a way of preventing the British from controlling this force, while also obtaining more American supplies (Ven 2003: 35). For Stilwell, commanding an army without committing many American soldiers to battle was a chance to avenge his defeat in Burma (White 1991: 116–117).

When it came to the site of the training camp, however, Chiang Kai-shek and Stilwell had different concerns. Chiang proposed Darjeeling in Assam as the training site, on grounds that it was close to the Chinese border and Chinese troops could easily return to China via Tibet (AH, 15 June 1942). However, Chiang's suggestion conflicted with Stilwell's plan to train Chinese troops to reconquer Burma. If Chiang Kai-shek found a site near the Chinese border and decided to bring his troops back to China once their training was complete, Stilwell would have no troops at his disposal to achieve his military goal (White 1991: 117).

In declining Chiang Kai-shek's proposal, Stilwell stressed that Darjeeling was too far away from the main transportation lines to receive adequate supplies. He argued that Ramgarh, a small town 200 miles northeast of Calcutta, was more suitable for the training programme (White 1991: 117). Stilwell elaborated on the three advantages of Ramgarh: its climate, location, and facilities.

Ramgarh is located in the district of Hazaribah in southern Bihar (today's Jharkhand state). Hazaribagh district lies at the heart of the Chota Nagpur Plateau, with an average altitude of 600 metres (Lister 1917: 2). The district's relatively high altitude makes its climate different from that of neighbouring districts. During the early twentieth century, the average temperature in Hazaribagh was around 23 °C and the mean humidity was about 51%, much lower than levels in coastal areas such as Calcutta (where the mean humidity is around 76% throughout the year). Even during the rainy season, which began in June, the air in Hazaribagh was much drier than that in lower regions (Lister 1917: 24–25). Since more than half of the CEF soldiers were suffering from tropical diseases and malnutrition, Stilwell argued that the climate in Ramgarh would help them recover and take part in training and fighting (Romanus and Sunderland 1987: 213).

Second, Ramgarh sits on a rich coalfield in the Damodar Valley (Lister 1917: 28–29). To transport coal, a railway station was built in Ramgarh in the early twentieth century, and the town was linked directly to large cities such as Patna and Calcutta through the Grand Chord and Bengal Nagpur Railways (Lister 1917: 114–145). In 1939, the Indian National Congress selected Ramgarh as the site for its 53<sup>rd</sup> session because it was located at the junction of several railway lines.<sup>5</sup> Since supplies could be transported to Ramgarh very easily from Calcutta and Patna, while trained troops could be transported to the Burma frontline through Ledo, Ramgarh was a perfect location for the training programme.

Thirdly, there was a huge Indian Army cantonment in Ramgarh, which was largely vacant in 1942. Given the cantonment's established facilities, Stilwell thought that it could easily accommodate the Chinese soldiers (Romanus and Sunderland 1987: 213).

Persuaded by Stilwell, Chiang Kai-shek agreed to let his troops travel to Ramgarh. However, when Stilwell asked the Indian government to make arrangements for the Chinese soldiers in Ramgarh, the government told him that it could not accommodate any Chinese units because the cantonment facilities in Ramgarh were too old and run down (White 1991: 162–164). The British did not reveal to Stilwell that they had a modern PoW (Prisoner of War) internment camp in Ramgarh, next to the cantonment. By evacuating internees from the internment camp, the British could easily accommodate the CEF in Ramgarh.

### Building a Colonial Internment Camp in Ramgarh

India was not a typical destination for British PoWs until the Boer War. During the Second Boer War (1899–1902), the British authorities in South Africa struggled to accommodate large numbers of Boer PoWs, due to limited resources and security risks. They therefore launched an evacuation of Boer

<sup>5</sup>“Venue of Congress Session: Ramgarh Estate Chosen”, *Times of India*, 16 May 1939.

PoWs from South Africa to other parts of the British Empire, including Mauritius, Seychelles, Ceylon, and St. Helena. When the small islands were filled to capacity with PoWs, the government of India was pressured to share the burden of other colonies. By the end of the Boer War, there were around 9,000 Boer PoWs in India (Hofmeyr 2012: 365).

To accommodate these PoWs, the government of India built 17 internment camps across the country. Most camps were located around the cantonment areas, close to accessible transportation and military guards.

Since the British authorities regarded the Boers as white people, Boer PoWs were never used as labourers in India; the British feared that their colonial legitimacy would be undermined if local residents saw white people doing menial labour. In addition, facilities such as recreation grounds, schools, libraries, and cinemas were introduced to the internment camp to meet the needs of internees (Hofmeyr 2012: 366). During the following decades, India retained these measures, accommodating white PoWs in internment camps with comfortable facilities. During World War I, German and Austrian civilians in India were also detained in comfortable internment camps (Thormeyer 2010).

During World War II, the British captured around 60,000 Italian soldiers in North and East Africa (TNA, 29 May 1941). Although these Italian PoWs were initially imprisoned in Egypt, the British authorities soon discovered that local political situations and supplies were no longer sufficient to maintain such a large number of PoWs, especially when a German invasion of Egypt appeared imminent (Moore 2002: 20–21).

From 1940 onwards, Italian PoWs in Egypt were evacuated to other parts of the British Empire. By the end of 1941, the government of India had received more than 45,000 Italian PoWs (TNA, 22 January 1941). At the same time, all males over 16 from hostile countries (apart from diplomats) were arrested by the civilian authorities in India and handed over to the military; most of these foreigners were German (TNA 1939: 1–2). To accommodate the PoWs and civilian detainees, the Indian government set up 29 internment camps in cantonment areas across the country. All of these camps had proper heating and lighting, with adequate space for both indoor and outdoor activities. The internees were provided with various facilities, including recreation areas, shower baths, toilets, and hospitals. Internees also received free rations of food, fuel, lighting, and water (TNA 1939: 4–5).

Because of its location and climate, Ramgarh was selected as one of 29 internment camps in India. In 1940, an internment camp was built alongside the Ramgarh cantonment; it was modelled on other civilian internment camps in India and featured the same full range of facilities. The first group of internees in the Ramgarh internment camp were German civilians from the Dutch East Indies. When Nazi Germany invaded the Netherlands in May 1940, German citizens living in the Dutch East Indies were detained by the Dutch colonial authorities. Fearing an imminent Japanese attack, the Dutch subsequently sent the German internees to India. By April 1941, the Ramgarh internment camp housed 600 German civilians (NAI, 18 November 1943).

In addition to Germans, Italian PoWs, most of whom were high-ranking officers, were also brought into Ramgarh. In fact, the British authorities developed a policy of turning some Italian PoWs into anti-Fascist elements. The first step in implementing this policy was to dismantle each unit's disciplinary structure to prevent hard-line fascist elements from promoting anti-British ideas. Once the Italian PoWs arrived in India, soldiers and officers were separated and sent to different internment camps (TNA, 22 January 1941). High-ranking Italian officers were sent to internment camps with a full range of facilities, in the hope that good treatment in PoW camps would undermine their will to fight and induce large-scale surrenders (TNA, 9 January 1943). Because the Ramgarh internment camp met the requirements for providing comfortable living conditions for officers, some 2,000 Italian officers were housed there.

The Ramgarh internment camp was separated into two sections. One section accommodated Italian PoWs, while the other housed German civilians. The camp, encircled by a wire fence, was designed to accommodate around 7,000 people. The Italian and German living spaces were both located in the centre of the camp. To the north, a couple of bungalows provided a bathroom, washhouse, drying room, and toilets. The cook house, canteen, medical room, and clothing and shoe store were located to the south (TNA 1939: Appendix 'E').

With the internees evacuated and tents erected in the living space, the Ramgarh internment camp could easily accommodate CEF units and provide facilities for their recuperation. However, the government of India did not even inform Stilwell of the camp's existence when he proposed setting up a training

centre in Ramgarh. The reluctance of the British authorities to allow Chinese troops to remain in India reflected the troubled state of Sino-British relations throughout the war.

### Wartime Sino-British Relations

Although the British authorities and Chinese Nationalist government were allies during World War II, relations between the two powers were by no means stable or friendly. Both countries had geopolitical concerns, which placed them at loggerheads throughout the war. From 1937 to 1941, the British government adopted a policy of appeasement toward Japan, which was engaged in military expansion in China, to safeguard British colonial rule in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia (Best 1995; Bickers 1999; Clifford 1967; Haggie 1981; Lee 1973; Shai 1974; Perry 2011;). Frustrated by British appeasement, the Chinese Nationalist government turned to the Soviet Union for aid and support (Graver 1988; Yao 2015). Concerned that a Sino-Soviet Union alliance could jeopardise British interests in Xinjiang and central Asia, the British authorities made a secret agreement with the Japanese in 1940 to share intelligence on communist and Soviet activities in the region (Lin 2005: 36–38).

The outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941 brought the British and the Chinese into an alliance. One of the Chinese Nationalist government's primary concerns was to maintain the supply line from India and Burma to China at a time when the political situation in India was extraordinarily unstable. Most Indian nationalists were outraged by the British decision to involve India in the war without consulting the Indian people. The Japanese invasion of Southeast Asia convinced Indian nationalists that their country would soon be under attack by the Japanese unless India could obtain independence immediately.<sup>6</sup>

To mediate the tensions between the British authorities and Indian nationalists and stabilise the political situation in India (HI, 30 January 1942), Chiang Kai-shek visited India in February 1942.<sup>7</sup> Since Chiang Kai-shek sympathised with the Indian nationalist movement, he tried to persuade Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy of India, to compromise with the Indian nationalists. He also spoke face-to-face with Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi to show his support for the nationalist beliefs of the Indian people (HI, 18 February 1942).

Chiang Kai-shek's approach to the Indian nationalists upset the British authorities. The Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, complained that Chiang Kai-shek was trying to act as a judge between Britain and India; Chiang's attempt to pressure the Indian government to make a deal with the Congress Party was an intervention in India's internal affairs (TNA, 6 February 1942). The British government made a plan to retaliate against Chinese support for the Indian nationalist movement by encouraging the Tibetan government to seek independence from China (TNA, 16 June 1942).

British concern over China's expansion into Southeast and South Asia deepened when the CEF was ready to enter Burma in early 1942. Fearing that the Chinese Nationalist government would develop influence in Burma through the military operation, the British authorities did not want Chinese troops to participate in defending Burma (TNA, 31 May 1948). When the Chinese troops were eventually called into Burma, the British were unwilling to provide necessary supplies (Du 1986: 1–42).

The British authorities were also worried because active Chinese involvement in South and Southeast Asia had been largely supported by the Americans. Since the early twentieth century, The US government had been uncomfortable with the colonial order in Asia (Manela 2007; Louis 1978). Although many American policymakers and military observers, frustrated by the weakness of the Chinese military and the corruption of the Nationalist government, saw China as an unreliable and insignificant ally (Ven 2017: 157–178), the American president Franklin D. Roosevelt worked hard to treat China as a Great Power. In doing so, he hoped to end the European colonial order and limit the expansion of the Soviet Union (Liu 1996; Shrega 1983; Stoler 2000; Whitfield 2001: 40–60; Xiang 1995;).

When Stilwell proposed training Chinese troops in Ramgarh in June 1942, the British authorities linked the proposal to China's intervention into India's internal politics and expansion into Southeast Asia, as well as to American support for China's growing influence in Asia. All of these came at a cost for the British Empire. To British policymakers in London and New Delhi, a Chinese Army training

<sup>6</sup>For more information on the Indian nationalists' response to World War II, see Khan 2015; Bayly and Harper 2005; Damodaran 1993.

<sup>7</sup>For details of Chiang Kai-shek's visit to India, see Xiao 2018; Duan 2009; Ji 2002; Chen 1991.

centre in India would definitely give the Chinese great leverage, further weakening Britain's already precarious colonial rule in India (BL, 26 June 1943). Some Indian government officials even believed that the Chinese troops in Ramgarh would back the Indian nationalists if a revolution or general strike broke out in India (NAI, 19 July 1943).

Being fully aware of the risk of accommodating a large number of Chinese soldiers in India, the British authorities tried to decline Stilwell's proposal directly. However, the British relied heavily on American support during the war, and were therefore unwilling to antagonise the Americans by revealing their own geo-political concerns (TNA, 19 July 1943). A non-political reason (that the Ramgarh containment was too old to serve as a CEF training centre), was proposed as an objection to Stilwell's plan.

After learning from his agents of the existence of the internment camp in Ramgarh, Stilwell pointed out that the British could turn the internment camp into a CEF training centre after evacuating the internees and PoWs who were based there. Understanding British concerns, Stilwell stressed that the initiative to train Chinese troops in India would be short-term and temporary; trained units would be immediately dispatched to Burma to take part in operations. Stilwell also asked the American Chief of Staff, General Marshall, to put more pressure on the British. Marshall later warned the British authorities to consider the consequences of obstructing the establishment of the Ramgarh training centre, given the large amount of aid they received from the US government (White 1991: 162–164). Under such pressure, the British authorities eventually agreed to evacuate the Ramgarh internment camp and turn it into a CEF training centre at the end of June 1942 (NA, 28 June 1942).

## Conclusion

In early August 1942, around 10,000 Chinese soldiers (from the New 38<sup>th</sup> Division and the Fifth Army) arrived in Ramgarh and began their training (AH, 29 July 1942). Some CEF soldiers later recalled that when they entered the residential area in the Ramgarh camp, they were surprised by the spacious rooms and sophisticated modern facilities (Wang 2005: 166). At the end of World War II, more than 60,000 Chinese soldiers were trained in Ramgarh. These soldiers would become the backbone of the Allied victory in Burma.

The importance of the CEF, however, has generally been either mythicised or ignored. In Chinese national history, the experience of the CEF in India and Burma was one of many episodes used to show that Chinese soldiers fought bravely against the Japanese invaders and sacrificed themselves for their nation. The national history has not produced serious, critical scholarship; instead, it has inspired the growth of a genre of popular works mythicising the CEF. Western scholarship on the Pacific War has largely ignored the CEF.

The lack of scholarly attention to the CEF has led to confusion and errors in the historical record. In a book on the CBI theatre in World War II, Ramgarh is described as a camp used to detain more than 20,000 Italian PoWs during World War I (Xu 2007: 202). A memoir drafted by a former CEF officer states that the CEF selected Ramgarh as the site of its training centre because of its remoteness and beautiful landscape (Sun 2005: 30). Overall, few studies that mention the CEF describe the specific context and backdrop that led to the establishment of the CEF Ramgarh training centre (Dunlop 2016; Lathrop 1981: 403–432; Tuchman 2017: 404; Vu 2019).

Drawing on multinational archives and documents, the present study places the establishment of the CEF Ramgarh training centre in the context of the decades-long history of colonial internment-camp building in India and the adversarial Sino-British relationship during World War II. In so doing, this study not only examines the origins of the CEF experience in India, but also transcends the limits of China's national historiography of the War of Resistance.

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