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2008

China and the Great War: China's Pursuit of a New National Identity and Internationalization (Book Review)

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Recommended Citation

Curran, Thomas D. "China and the Great War: China's Pursuit of a New National Identity and Internationalization". *Journal of Asian History* 42.2 (2008): 213-214.

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Altogether, the book is an important and welcome contribution to the study of modern Central Asia and, in particular, to the history of its different nationalisms. Its only serious deficiencies are the lack of a bibliography and the lack of indices.

Indiana University

Yuri Bregel

Xu Guozi: *China and the Great War: China's Pursuit of a New National Identity and Internationalization*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), xiv + 316pp., \$80.00. ISBN 0-521-84212-3

The premise of this interesting book is that for China World War I was a transformative event: it brought to the forefront leaders who sought to enter the war in Europe as a means to bring China into the international system as a full-fledged member. Revising conventional views that the Chinese responded to the war passively until they were drawn into it by forces essentially outside their control, Xu argues that the majority of Chinese leaders and opinion makers sensed that the war presented an opportunity for China to reverse a century of victimization at the hands of foreigners and enter the community of nations as an equal partner of the great powers. By seeking engagement with the allies and participating in the inevitable post-war restructuring of the international system, China would emerge as a major player in the diplomatic arena and the Chinese would repair their damaged self-esteem.

Xu shows that the impulse to engage the powers was both strong and widely felt in China, and that the decision to enter the war was both entirely rational and made by Chinese after a lengthy process of deliberation and political negotiation. Consistent with other scholarship which shows that during the post-1911 decade an emerging public sector became fully involved in the formulation of China's foreign policy, Xu demonstrates that public opinion played a major role in the evolution of the pro-war policy. He adds that the particular strategy for doing so was debated intensely among China's leaders, and he analyses the dynamic political forces that would eventually take China into the war on the allied side. While illuminating the pathways that led to China's 1917 declaration of war on Germany, Xu also reveals both the extent of the Chinese investment in Wilsonian idealism and the depth of their disillusionment when their hopes were shattered at the peace conference in Versailles (May 1919). Meanwhile, he takes issue with other scholars who hold that China's endeavors at Versailles produced an abject failure. As is well known, the Chinese did lose their claims regarding the disposition of former German holdings in Shandong Province, but by pressing their case energetically, practicing diplomacy with skill and ingenuity, and refusing to ratify the final agreement, Chinese diplomats demonstrated that China had both the determination and the capacity to exert itself in the international arena; after nearly one hundred years of gunboat diplomacy and unequal treaties, the Chinese were prepared to recover their national sovereignty.

Apart from dealing with China's effort to use the war as an opportunity to exert its influence abroad, Xu aims to probe the Chinese attempt to define for themselves a new national identity. The prominent place occupied by the concept of identity in the book's subtitle is no accident, for the author argues that the war played a pivotal role in "shap-

ing modern Chinese historical consciousness and national mooring.” [p. 10] China emerged from the war, Xu writes, “fundamentally different” from what it had been in 1914 – “socially, intellectually, culturally, and ideologically.” [p. 16] Demonstrating that the war affected China in so many ways would be a tall order for a book that focused its attentions on as broad a spectrum of topics as is suggested here. The emphasis of this work, however, is placed more narrowly on diplomacy and politics rather than ideas, society, and culture, and one is left wondering precisely what the author thinks the elements of China’s wartime and post-war identity were, and who were its most important spokesmen. Xu does little to build upon the writings of scholars who over the past couple of decades have addressed directly the subject of Chinese nationalism and the Republican-era search for meaning. An additional weakness is that at times the author, who takes great pride in China’s diplomatic accomplishments during and immediately after the war, writes with a passion that might raise suspicions about his objectivity. Fortunately, these are minor flaws in a book that is well argued and based on sound and original analysis of a wide range of archival and other primary materials. Xu has produced a solid piece of scholarship. It is the first English-language monograph that deals with the Chinese motivation for entering World War I, and it adds considerably to our understanding of Chinese diplomacy and politics during the early Warlord period.

Sacred Heart University

Thomas D. Curran

Liu, Xiaoyuan: *Reins of Liberation: An Entangled History of Mongolian Independence, Chinese Territoriality, and Great Power Hegemony, 1911–1950*. (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), xxxi + 474pp., \$65.00. ISBN 0–8047–5426–8

Xiaoyuan Liu’s ambitiously complex study addresses at least three distinct themes. It is an account of the turbulent history of the pan-Mongolian movement in the first half of the twentieth century. It is a story of China’s efforts to re-invent itself as a modern nation-state within the territorial boundaries of the defunct Qing Empire. And it is a history of great power struggle for control of the vast stretches of Inner Asia; a game, in which the moves of the key players – China, the Soviet Union, to a lesser extent Japan and the United States – determined the destiny of the Mongolian people. It is, indeed, “an entangled history”, and Liu succeeds for the most part in disentangling its murky plots.

Liu is at his strongest when he explores the Guomindang’s, and then the CCP’s, efforts to define what China was and what it was not. Both regimes claimed Inner and Outer Mongolia as China’s inalienable parts, but, under Soviet pressure, both reluctantly relinquished their claim to Outer Mongolia, tortuously reconciling China’s territoriality with the geopolitical reality. At the same time, the CCP’s ethnic policies, in Liu’s opinion, were more successful than those of the Guomindang. Whereas the GMD’s “narrowly construed Chinese nationalism (...) helped rip the multi-ethnic fabric of the Qing Empire,” the Chinese Communists, “in upholding communism in a class-based sociopolitical revolution (...) managed to fashion an ideology that in a sense had a supra-ethnic appeal, similar to the Manchu imperial authority’s for Inner Asian peoples.” (p. 85)