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Provincial Patriots: The Hunanese and Modern China

Thomas D. Curran Ph.D.

Sacred Heart University, currant@sacredheart.edu

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Recommended Citation

Curran, Thomas D. Ph.D., "Provincial Patriots: The Hunanese and Modern China" (2009). *History Faculty Publications*. Paper 28.
http://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/his_fac/28

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Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution. The attention devoted to leprosy control is now being replaced by current epidemics: AIDS, SARS, bird flu.

What makes Leung's book important and demonstrates why disease histories should be written are the consequences which develop far beyond the medical – consequences that reach into the social, economic, and the political domains of a state, and perhaps spill over into world concern and judgment, not just of the state but of its people.

Indiana University

Ruth I. Meserve

Platt, Stephen R.: *Provincial Patriots: The Hunanese and Modern China*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), viii + 278pp., \$49.95. ISBN 978-0-674-02665-0

When the Qing dynasty collapsed in 1911 it was not a foregone conclusion that China would re-emerge at some point as a centralized, bureaucratic empire. Scholars of Chinese history have long noted that some Chinese thinkers in the first decades of the twentieth century believed that provincial autonomy, perhaps fragmentation of the Chinese empire into discrete, province-size nation-states, was an attractive model for China's future development. For the most part, however, the mainstream of historical interpretation has favored the paradigm of national unity that was constructed by pan-Chinese nationalists who sought to re-establish a multiethnic but unitary state; historians have adopted an interpretive model that assumes a near universal desire among modern Chinese for a single, well-integrated nation.

This work provides a counter narrative to this school of thought by demonstrating that there was a strong current of provincial patriotism in Hunan Province dating back at least to Wang Fuzhi, a seventeenth-century Hunanese scholar who chose the life of a recluse rather than acknowledge the legitimacy of Manchu rule. Platt argues that Wang's writings, noteworthy especially for their spirit of defiance, were used by nineteenth- and twentieth-century Hunanese scholars as a foundation upon which to build a distinctive Hunanese identity and as a resource for the promotion of Hunanese independence in the face of both the Qing state and the centralizing efforts of the post-1911 Chinese Republic. Platt traces notions of Hunanese localism through the scholarly and political activities of Hunanese reformers and radicals who attempted to fashion a developmental model that to one degree or another raised the possibility of provincial autonomy. In particular, revolutionaries from Hunan such as Tan Sitong, Huang Xing, and Mao Zedong were strongly attracted to a provincial, or what Platt terms "grassroots," version of Chinese nationalism. The treatment of Mao here is particularly enlightening for it shows that in his early years the devotee of centralized power and future Chairman of the People's Republic and was an active partisan of Hunanese self rule. Platt's exploration of this aspect of Mao's career is by itself an interesting and important contribution to the field.

The thread with which Platt ties his work together is the use to which Hunanese scholars and activists put the writings of Wang Fuzhi. Unfortunately, at times the thread is a bit hard to follow because nowhere in the book is there a complete summary of Wang's ideas, including what he may have thought about the relationship between the provinces and the Chinese state. Platt acknowledges this lacuna, noting that it is not his intention to produce a "conventional philosophical analysis" of Wang's writings [p. 3]. The book might have

been improved, however, had the author delved a bit more intentionally into Wang's ideas, especially those that speak directly to the question of Chinese identity. Wang, after all, retreated into eremitic scholarship essentially as a reaction to the Manchu conquest of China in 1644 and the failure of the Ming remnants subsequently to organize an effective resistance movement. It was apparently the inability of the unitary Ming state to defend China from "barbarians," not Wang's desire to uphold Hunanese provincialism against Chinese state-builders, that inspired Wang, and Platt himself points out that it was not until the 1860s, long after Wang had died, that a sense of provincial identity emerged – in the form of "a flood-crest of regional pride" and as a result the successes of Zeng Guofan's Hunan Army against the armies of the Taiping rebels. Platt makes very clear the fact that Hunanese provincials took pride in Wang's scholarly career, but the connections between Wang's scholarship, his heroic stand against foreign invasion, and Hunanese provincial patriotism are less than perfectly drawn. The reader is thus left wondering exactly what it was about Wang (other than his outstanding record of scholarly achievement in a province otherwise known as an academic and cultural backwater) that attracted so many Hunanese intellectuals to him and warrants Platt's labeling him the "archetype of the modern Hunanese character [p. 3]."

That said, in the final analysis this is a minor point. The book remains a wonderful piece of scholarship that directs our attention to forces that were (and no doubt still are) at work in modern China which give pause to conventional portraits of Chinese unity that appear in the histories written by the victors in China's long twentieth-century struggle for self-definition.

Sacred Heart University

Thomas D. Curran

Lary, Diana (ed.): *The Chinese State at the Borders*. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), xi + 306pp., pbk \$32.95. ISBN 978-0-7748-1334-1

This timely collection of thirteen lucid essays examines borders and the central state in China during the last five centuries. Diana Lary's introduction and Alexander Woodside's panoptic essay on the center and borderlands offer cogent discussion of basic terms and some enduring themes that are taken up in the more detailed contributions that follow. Essays by Benjamin Elman, Nicola di Cosmo, Timothy Brook, Leo Shin, Peter Perdue, and Andre Schmid provide nuanced perspectives on shifting ways of understanding and representing relations with neighboring polities and the incorporation of new lands and peoples during the Ming and Qing dynasties (circa 1400–1900). Their accounts also address court politics and narratives of empire. Diana Lary, Wang Ning, Stevan Harrell, and Pitman Potter examine developments in the twentieth century, most especially the place of the border and border peoples in the People's Republic of China. Victor Zatsopine's discussion of the Amur River and Van Nguyen-Marshall's examination of the Confucian underpinnings of ostensibly West-inspired charity organizations in Vietnam during the early twentieth century round out the volume.

The collection offers several fruitful lines of inquiry. Inclusion of several historical periods in a single volume illustrates certain continuities between the place and rhetoric of borders during the imperial and post-imperial periods. Perdue, for instance, shows that Qing court narratives of the incorporation of distant lands and peoples stressing the inevi-