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Transmitting the Ideal of Enlightenment: Chinese Universities since the Late Nineteenth Century (Book Review)

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Mak, Ricarado K. S. (ed.): *Transmitting the Ideal of Enlightenment: Chinese Universities since the Late Nineteenth Century*. (Lanham: University Press of America, 2009), vi + 155pp., pbk no price. ISBN 978-0-7618-4727-4.

This is a collection of seven conference papers that were delivered in April, 2006 at a symposium on historical perspectives on higher education at Hong Kong Baptist University. The essays were chosen because they review various aspects of the history of modern universities in China since the late nineteenth century. Generally speaking, they focus on ways by which Chinese reformers adapted to Chinese circumstances models of higher education that evolved in Europe and America after the Enlightenment.

Mak introduces the collection by making the interesting, though unremarkable, observation that cultural elites play a crucial role in exploring and articulating the historical memories, common myths, values, and other elements of shared culture that theorists such as Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner believe form the core elements of a nation's identity. In the modern period, universities became crucial institutions in the formation of national culture because it was in them that these cultural elites were forged. As for China, the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century introduction of universities had important implications for Chinese culture because the elites who played such an important role in shaping it were powerfully influenced by them. As Chinese education was transformed, so were Chinese elites, and as a consequence so were important cultural patterns.

Another motif developed here is that China's universities evolved synchronously with changing political structures. Early in the history of modern Chinese universities the Chinese concept of a university was shaped by the British Oxbridge model, which emphasized university autonomy and classical learning. That model was overturned in the wake of the Sino-Japanese War and replaced by a Japanese model that emphasized practical, specialized training and a centralized structure, and that approach was in turn revised after 1912 under the auspices of the republic's first Minister of Education, Cai Yuanpei, who favored the German universities' emphasis on cultivating a well-rounded, less specialized graduate.

During the Republican period political conditions continued to influence the ways by which universities, and therefore elite roles, were transformed. Due to political turbulence, for example, alumni networks that were the functional equivalent of the literati factions of earlier times found it difficult to survive. Meanwhile, even though the influence of China's university faculty and alumni upon the nation's political life was attenuated, such people did accomplish a great deal to transmit advanced Western knowledge and promote the professionalization of their disciplines. (See Michael Wing-hin Kam.)

That process of professionalization is highlighted in this volume by two scholars who review the history of biomedical education in China, finding that its emergence was part of a long process by which medical knowledge and the organizational concepts of Western research-based education were disseminated. This process, Ka-che Yip argues, was part of a "fundamental reorientation of educational philosophy and an intellectual 'revolution' that was the product of decades of political and social change" (p. 69). Timothy Man Kong Wong echoes these findings by showing that a biomedical research culture continued to thrive in Hong Kong universities even during the 1960s and '70s, when developments on the Chinese mainland took a dramatically different turn.

The historical accounts in this collection close with a piece by Lauren Pfister that deals precisely with this turn, arguing that the Chinese Communist Party's glorification of revolution and its deification of Mao Zedong produced an "ideologically devastating despair" (p. 125) as the

regime obstructed traditional philosophical or religious inquiry and educational institutions were replaced by “Maoist-Marxist teaching units” (p. 117).

The collection is unified by a concern for the intersections of developments on several levels: politics and culture; foreign and domestic educational concepts; and traditional and modern world views and attitudes toward learning. The quality of the essays is generally high and the research is thoroughly documented, in one instance (Pfizer) with highly informative commentary being added to the footnotes. Some of the essays cover topics that are already well-known components of the historical record, such as the historical evolution of higher educational models. Others, such as Eva Kit Way Man’s concluding piece, in which Man argues that contemporary higher education in China could well benefit from a revival of the Neo-Confucian humanistic tradition on the grounds that the ancient Confucian text the *Great Learning* is compatible with the post-modern insight that knowledge is constituted by processes that involve the individual’s interaction with social and political institutions, are original and interesting. Overall, one would have to say the collection is mixed; it covers some well-trodden terrain, yet it also introduces new data, and it is both interesting and informative.

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MacKinnon, Stephen R.: *Wuhan, 1938: War, Refugees, and the Making of Modern China*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), xv + 182pp., \$39.95. ISBN 978-0-520-25445-9.

In 1924 Dr. Sun Yat-sen famously referred to the Chinese people as a “sheet of loose sand,” referring to their attachment to family and clan solidarities and lack of a national spirit. The 20th century accomplished a great deal to alter this impression by forging the Chinese into a nation, and in this short monograph Stephen R. MacKinnon argues that a huge step in that direction was taken by those who participated in the retreat to Wuhan in the face of the Japanese invasion in 1937–1938. As Wuhan became the staging ground and logistics base for the defense of the central Yangzi region, and as the region received a wave of migration that eventually included nearly 100 million refugees, the tricity experienced a political, social, and cultural transformation that paved the way for the far more unified and integrated society that emerged in the 1950s and beyond.

The generals who defended Wuhan were politically neutral with respect to the contest between the Nationalist and Communist parties. Reversing the common perception that China’s military leadership had no coherent strategy for the Anti-Japanese War, MacKinnon argues that these generals were non-partisan professionals who worked together to implement a strategy of strategic withdrawal that forced the militarily superior Japanese imperial army into a costly war of attrition and shattered its morale. Meanwhile, by prolonging the surrender of Wuhan they created a refuge for intellectuals, capitalists, and business managers from coastal areas who were inspired by a shared outrage at the Japanese invasion to mobilize the energies of millions of people. In the process these groups changed the social and psychological landscape of China. Not only did they help to facilitate a state intervention in community relief and health work that “laid the foundation for the comprehensive social-welfare and health programs later instituted in the PRC and the Republic of China” (p. 54) but they attracted volunteers and support across the political spectrum and cultivated within the population an “unprecedented level of community volunteerism” and an “integrated collective consciousness” (p. 61). Also, the intellectuals who descended on Wuhan played an especially important role by committing themselves to reshaping the arts so as to maximize their appeal to the masses. While mobilizing support for