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Harold M. Tanner. *The Battle for Manchuria and the Fate of China: Siping, 1946.* Twentieth-Century Battles Series. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013. 288 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-00723-0.

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In recent years, China has assumed an increasing role in world economic and political affairs. To truly understand present-day China, scholars first need to understand the origins of the current state born of brutal civil war during the 1940s. In *The Battle for Manchuria and the Fate of China*, Harold M. Tanner, a professor at the University of North Texas, provides a well-organized and excellently researched work on one of the civil war's crucial battles at the city of Siping in 1946. This case study of decisive battles is important not only for students of Chinese society and history but also for general military history scholars.

Siping is a city in the Manchurian region of northeast China. Technically, four different engagements occurred there during the course of the civil war between the Nationalists of Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong's Communists, but historians consider the second battle to be the most important. This battle took place during the spring of 1946 amid negotiations led by American envoy George C. Marshall to broker a cease-fire between the warring sides. Fearing a global Communist threat, American officials wanted to strengthen the Chinese regime of Chiang but feared for its stability due to corruption and incompetence. They hoped a cease-fire would allow time for the Nationalists and Communists to forge a lasting peace that would keep Chiang's pro-American regime in place. The Communists and Nationalists, however, had other ideas. Each saw a cease-fire as a ploy to gain time and strength before continuing the war to eradicate their opponents.

During the chaotic days after the Japanese surrender, both Nationalists and Communists wanted to control Manchuria. Occupation by Soviet armies eventually enabled the Chinese Communists to seize control of large portions of Manchuria, but Chiang's Nationalist forces slowly started moving into the area when the Soviets began to withdraw in early 1946. Mao and his advisors decided to wage what they hoped would be a decisive battle at the critical rail junction of Siping. They hoped to smash the Nationalist forces and secure control of Manchuria. This strategy represented a change for the Communists from a traditional guerilla, hit-and-run type of combat to a conventional method of warfare. Chinese Communists entrenched themselves around the city and waged a vigorous defense for several weeks, but Nationalist forces proved too strong and eventually won control of the city. Soon after the battle, the cease-fire negotiated by the Americans took effect but it did not last. Fighting soon resumed and after several hard fought campaigns, Mao's Communists emerged as victors.

Tanner covers the battle–its context, background, and consequences–thoroughly. Prior to discussing the actual battle, he provides information on the geography of Manchuria and Siping; its immediate history, including the Japanese occupation during World War II; and the intricate scheming of Nationalists, Communists, and Americans. He presents needed context without smothering the reader with unnecessary detail. Tanner describes the battle itself clearly and succinctly and provides an excellent discussion of its ramifications.

The major question concerns the decisiveness of the battle of Siping. In retrospect, many Nationalists have looked on this battle as a lost chance to win the war. According to this view, the Nationalists had the Communists in full retreat until the Americans interfered with the cease-fire that halted pursuit of Mao's armies. The pause allowed the Communists to rebuild their forces and eventually win control of Manchuria. Without a cease-fire, supporters of this argument believe that Nationalists would have secured control of Manchuria and eventually defeated the Communists across China. In response, Tanner argues that Siping did not set the stage for a possible Nationalist victory in Manchuria. Chiang's armies faced logistical and manpower problems and that further advance might have fatally exposed Nationalist forces to Communist hit-and-run attacks. Another issue with Siping concerns the wisdom of Mao's decision to wage a

set battle instead of maintaining a guerilla style of warfare. The official view holds that Mao correctly decided to make a stand at Siping and it became a critical step in the eventual Communist victory despite the military defeat. Others voice the opinion that Siping represented a waste of Communist military resources and was an overall bad strategic decision.

Decisive battle has long been a theme and point of debate among military historians and Tanner's work adds an important case study to the field for scholars to examine. Overall, this book stands as an excellent example of a well-written and well-researched work that makes use of many English and Chinese sources. One strength of Tanner's book is that it uses sources from both the Communist and Nationalist camps to provide coverage from all major perspectives. Some China scholars might argue with some of Tanner's portrayals of the relationships between key Chinese leaders and generals, but this book should be highly recommended to anyone with an interest in this region and era.

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