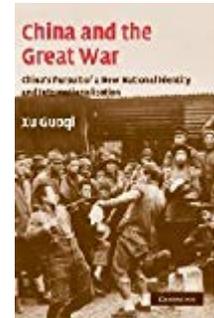


Xu Guoqi. *China and the Great War: China's Pursuit of a New National Identity and Internationalization.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. xiv + 316 pp. \$80.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-521-84212-9.



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Discussions of China and World War I tend to focus narrowly on the Versailles Conference and the decision to turn former German territorial concessions in Shandong over to Japan rather than return them to China. Xu Guoqi, assistant professor of History at Kalamazoo College, believes that scholars have overemphasized the Shandong issue, which leads him to take a broader approach to the subject in an attempt to go beyond the "betrayal complex." Xu examines China's war policy in the larger context of the changes that swept China between 1895 and 1919. Rather than interpret World War I and the Versailles Conference as another example of a weak and divided China suffering abuse at the hands of foreign imperialists, Xu sees China as an active agent, attempting to break out of its regional isolation and take its place in the international system. Far from being used or exploited by the Allies, China eagerly sought involvement in the war in order to win a place alongside the victors at the peace conference, part of an attempt to forge a new national identity as a member of the international community. In brief, China's attempts to join the war marked its "internationalization," which Xu de-

fines as being "engaged by the international system, ideas, forces, and trends" (p. 19).

The work is divided into three parts, dealing with important changes China experienced after 1895, China's attempts to join the war effort, and the impact of China's war policy, respectively. The book begins with a review of important developments in the period after China's defeat at the hands of Japan in the 1894-1895 war. Xu focuses on the rise of nationalism, the dramatic increase in the number of periodicals circulating in China, and the series of changes unleashed by the 1911 Revolution. One important consequence of these changes was the emergence of a "foreign policy public" (p. 64). Public opinion is perhaps better described as elite opinion, coming as it did from such prominent figures as Liang Qichao, Chen Duxiu, and Hu Shi, but Xu insists that the common people also made their opinions known through strikes and boycotts against foreign companies and goods. This foreign policy public influenced the Chinese government to adopt a "new diplomacy" in which China operated as a nation state within an international system governed by West-

ern standards of law and practice. Xu sees this as a turning point in China's national identity, moving from "Middle Kingdom" to modern nation state.

China's desire to enter World War I is a prime example of this new diplomacy. Many saw participation in the war as an opportunity for China to recover German concessions in Shandong province and to achieve its larger goal of internationalization. Japan's 1915 attempt to secure further economic and political concessions in China, known as the 21 Demands, inspired Chinese president Yuan Shikai to explore the possibility of joining the war effort. The Japanese objected to this proposal, understanding that it threatened Japan's plans to acquire those same German concessions. British and French leaders proved unwilling to antagonize Japan, which they saw as the more important ally in East Asia, and rejected China's offer to join the war against Germany. As an alternate strategy, China began sending laborers to France. Xu sees this not as a sign of China's weakness and continued exploitation, but as a part of a larger strategy designed to push China into the international community. He argues that the 140,000 Chinese laborers who traveled to France made significant contributions to the war effort and furthered China's goal of internationalization. These laborers returned to China with new ideas and experience in world affairs, serving as a "vanguard of new China's new national identity" (p. 147). Only when the United States joined the war and invited China to do the same did President Duan Qirui formally declare war on Germany in 1917. Xu regards this as a defining moment in which China declared war on the basis of rational principles of international law and national interest, as opposed to the irrational xenophobia of the Boxer Uprising. This represents a clear step forward in China's rise as a modern nation state participating as an equal in the international system.

After examining China's attempts to join the war, Xu analyzes the consequences of China's war

policy. The decision to enter the war triggered important debate among Chinese elites. While many saw this as an opportunity, other prominent figures disagreed for a variety of reasons. Some, including Sun Yat-sen, believed that China would be embarrassed or would needlessly antagonize Japan, and therefore preferred neutrality. So divisive proved the "great debate" of 1917 that it precipitated the initial struggles of what would develop into the warlord era of the early 1920s. As for the Shandong Question, Xu believes that rather than treating China as an equal the powers at Versailles treated China as a "third rate country, with its faith betrayed" (p.258). Yet the author credits Chinese leaders and the Versailles delegates with projecting a new image of China as a member of the international community. This set the stage for later recovery of the Shandong concessions at the Washington Conference of 1921-1922. Rather than a failure, Xu concludes that China's involvement in the Great War greatly contributed to China's "internationalization."

Among the strengths of this work is its impressive documentation. Xu's arguments are supported by rich archival materials from China, France, England, Germany, and the United States, which provide the most detailed discussion of China's involvement in World War I to date. It is also a successful combination of national and international histories. Xu's analysis of Chinese domestic history within the greater international history of World War I reflects the influence of his mentor, Akira Iriye. If there is a weakness, it is perhaps a tendency to generalize, particularly in the early chapters. Xu describes the late Qing dynasty as a thoroughly sinicized state with a "close minded and isolation[ist]" foreign policy (p. 22), which does not reflect the more recent Manchu-centered work of Pamela Crossley, James Hevia, and others. [1] The varied and complex 1911 Revolution is described as reflecting the "collective desire of the Chinese people for change" (p. 43), and Xu sees early-twentieth-century Chinese society as a whole "unified and politically engaged" (p. 54).

These are relatively minor criticisms of an otherwise impressive work. Xu Guoqi has indeed taken us beyond the "betrayal" of the Versailles Conference to emphasize the importance of the Great War in China's participation in the international community.

Note

[1]. Pamela Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999; James Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.

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