



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Germany and Republican China by William C. Kirby
Donald S. Sutton

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political groups and their role in modern Chinese politics. Louis Sigel argues for the importance of a group of treaty port-raised diplomats (of which Tang Shaoyi is the model) in late Qing diplomacy and politics; K. S. Liew presents some wide-ranging reflections on the 1911 era and the prospects for a liberal alternative in China; S. K. Leong provides the most original research in the volume on the Hakka of the Lingnan region; and K. S. Shum provocatively challenges the “peasant revolution” theory of the Chinese Communist movement, arguing instead that class collaboration with “landlord – capitalist elites” was crucial to the revolution’s success.

It should be clear that few modern China courses will be organized around such a disparate set of topics, but there is material here of interest. Pong’s essay on the Tongzhi reformers provides a useful guide to the origins and import of the vocabulary of self-strengthening. He stresses the indigenous tradition of reformist thought, but also leaves us with a clear sense of a sort of anthropomorphizing of the state in the concern for national shame (*guochi*) in the face of foreign insult (*waiwu*). His argument that “The reformer” programme, if implemented, would have been adequate to propel China along the road to self-strengthening” (p. 54) would provide a lively topic for class discussion; but one wishes he had offered more insight into the nature and power base of the “conservative majority” (p. 50) which, with the support of a timid court, prevented progressive change.

Liew’s discussion of the “no revolution” (p. 271) versus “genuine democratic revolution” (p. 274) evaluations of 1911 presents less original information, but raises important issues based on the latest scholarship. Shum’s essay on the Chinese Communist Party is both less informed and less convincing (the argument proceeds from an analogy to peasant rebellions which required gentry supporters to succeed, without addressing the difference between rebellion and revolution) but is at least provocative. Regrettably, however, the two articles with the most important new scholarship – Wright on the Kuomintang and the coal industry, and Leong on the Hakka – are probably too narrow for most classroom use. They do, however, present important analyses which many specialists will find of interest.

JOSEPH W. ESHERICK

Germany and Republican China. By WILLIAM C. KIRBY. [Stanford: Stanford University Press. 1984. 361 pp. \$35.00.]

This is not a diplomatic history but an exemplary treatment of Sino-western relations in the Fairbank tradition of multi-archival research, showing each side in the eyes of the other as well as in historical hindsight. Focusing on the German and Chinese people and institutions that mediated mutual relations and German influence from 1928 to 1938, and paying close heed to the ideological as well as

financial transactions accompanying diplomacy, William Kirby has produced a work that will be hard to supersede.

Disparities in wealth and development in the 1930s made Germany and Nationalist China unlikely partners, but Professor Kirby shows that the two governments established a surprising degree of economic interdependence. By the middle of the decade, Germany was responsible for 17 per cent of China's trade, and in early 1936 closely trailed the United States at the head of importing countries. China was almost as important to Germany, becoming briefly its third largest trading partner and the third largest recipient of its investments.

How was this partnership established? Expertly used oral and archival sources in West Germany and Taiwan confirm the importance of mutual trust gradually built up between a few Chinese and German officials and private citizens, and underline the fact that Nazi Germany needed China's tungsten and antimony no less than China needed a source of credit for arms and industrialization. Two other factors on the German side are clarified here for the first time: the convenient barter arrangements set up through a dummy firm called HAPRO based on an earlier trade venture with Soviet Russia; and the generous guarantees and credits of the German Government to its own traders.

Chapters 4 and 7, on Nanking's (Nanjing's) economic programmes (the book's main emphasis), include the first account of the long-secret National Resources Commission (originally called the National Defence Planning Commission), which was important both as Chiang Kai-shek's personal instrument and in effective large-scale military – industrial planning and execution. Kirby makes much of the role of civilian experts (previously aloof from the Kuomintang) under the geologist Weng Wen-hao (Weng Wenhao). The NRC was responsible for a comprehensive, secret three-year plan formulated after three years of preparation in 1936, and in the months before the war took action that was "considerable by any standard," bringing all tungsten and antimony production under its control, establishing ferrotungsten works, central copper, chemical and manufacturing plants, and laying the groundwork for a central steel plant. Full-scale Japanese invasion soon interrupted these projects. The NRC itself persisted, along with the German influence it represented, though its war-time role awaits investigation.

Chapter 6 on the ideological influence of Germany is another original contribution. Kuomintang leaders from Chiang Kai-shek to Wang Ching-wei (Wang Jingwei) saw parallels between China's travails in the 1930s and Germany's in the previous decade, and sought political lessons to apply. Even non-party intellectuals admired the "strength of national character, efficient dictatorial government and obedient populace" they saw in Germany. But there was little grasp of Hitler's system and no agreement on what specifically should be borrowed. In a carefully nuanced analysis, Kirby distinguishes a

number of interpretations of fascism – the C C Clique were struck by the way fascist political techniques could bolster traditional morality; the Blue Shirts (who were among the few Chinese to take note of and praise anti-Semitism) linked the displacement of traditionalism and capitalism with “popular” dictatorship; Weng Wen-hao and other members of the Political Study clique confined themselves to pragmatic praise of fascist economic success; T’ang Liang-li, (Tang Liangli), Wang Ching-wei’s publicist, emphasized the “socialist” nature of National Socialism; Chiang Kai-shek himself saw fascism as salutary regimentation and obedience to law. Unlike some of his supporters, however, Chiang realized that a revived national spirit would have to come from within, and could not be simply imported along with the arms and industrial equipment. Kirby gives him due credit for this, stressing that Chiang’s much criticized New Life movement, though a “resounding failure,” did draw on Chinese roots, as well as on his *perception* of the German-style authoritarian state’s success in guiding individual morality. It was not an imitation of fascist methods.

The Chinese records are mostly those of civil bureaucrats who tended, at the time, to put to one side unpalatable political and military realities, and in retrospect to translate wishful programmes into actuality. In spite of Kirby’s general restraint on the issue, one suspects that the actual priorities and achievements of the NRC were more narrowly military than he claims; and that what he acknowledges to have been its “personal union” with Chiang Kai-shek may be construed, upon examination, to have run counter to longer-term national interest. In fact one easily forgets, in reading this book, that military-political exigencies took up almost all of Chiang’s attention. For an all-round portrayal of the Sino-German relationship one would have liked some consideration of war and politics, that is of the three-front struggle with communists, warlords, and Japan on which German advice was frequently offered and sometimes accepted.

The relationship was brief and very fragile, being dependent on a Nazi policy that risked collision with Japan, as that country repeatedly extended its control over Chinese territory and resources, and it collapsed with the Axis alliance of 1938. But Kirby does not exaggerate when he writes that when China faced west, in the Nanking decade, it faced Germany. With his help we can begin to see the place of the Sino-German connection in the history of foreign advisory missions – more harmonious than the successive larger-scale Sino-American or Sino-Russian involvements of the 1940s and 1950s, but more egalitarian and comprehensive than anything that had preceded it in modern times. Thanks to his breadth of focus and to an array of new sources, Kirby has written a book that will be indispensable in studying Kuomintang Nanking and of wide interest for its unfamiliar perspective on international politics in the 1930s.

DONALD S. SUTTON