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Review of Edward A. McCord, *The Power of the Gun: The Emergence of Modern Chinese Warlordism*

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Comments

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doomed to failure. These are only some of the important questions raised by Reynolds' thought-provoking but narrowly focused study. If he is right, not only in his arguments but his broader implications as well, the history of late Qing and Republican China will have to be seen in a new light.

Indiana University

Christopher Atwood

McCord, Edward A.: *The Power of the Gun: The Emergence of Modern Chinese Warlordism*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), ix + 436 pp., \$ 45.00. ISBN 0-520-08128-5.

In *The Power of the Gun*, Edward McCord argues that Chinese warlordism originated in the inability of civilian politicians in the early Republican era to come to a consensus on basic constitutional issues. Basing his conclusions on a narrative history of civilian-military relations in Hubei and Hunan provinces, he shows how resort to civil war by national leaders offered growing opportunities for commanders to strengthen their own position by independent negotiation with those leaders who needed their services.

According to McCord, the warlordism of the republic is a relatively late and historically contingent phenomenon. The turn to an educated soldiery in the Xinzheng reforms sparked the political involvement of the military that bore fruit in the 1911 revolution. This political ferment among the common soldiers and petty officers differed sharply, though, from the later pattern of entrepreneurial officers using completely apolitical troops as assets to expand their influence. This later sort of warlordism only emerged when repeated civil wars from 1913 to 1918 increased the number of units in the provinces and strengthened the power of commanders relative to both the local civilian administration and their superiors.

McCord thus rejects previous hypotheses that the rise of warlordism was due to some particular type of army, whether the highly personal *yongying* troops of the Tongzhi Restoration or the Japanese-modeled New Armies of the late Qing. Similarly he does not support the hypothesis that a sheer vacuum of civilian political administration after 1911 drew in military involvement. McCord finds in Hunan and Hubei, as other studies have shown elsewhere, not a vacuum of administrative power but rather a steady expansion in the sphere of civil politics in the late Qing and early Republican period.

McCord based his research on oral historical materials being published in the P. R. C., document collections published in Taiwan, and periodical literature from libraries in China and the United States. Hunan and Hubei were well chosen as the focus of this study, forming a natural unit on the border between northern- and southern-aligned warlords. He lucidly reviews late Qing military history and clearly explains the subsequent turbulent events. At times, however, the narrative in the later chapters of *The Power of the Gun* seems to be fuller than necessary for the argument yet too compressed to acquire any intrinsic interest.

McCord's thesis is well argued and applicable elsewhere in China. A more purely analytic approach, however, might have isolated more clearly some of the preconditions for military commanders to take advantage of civilian strife as

they did. One important precondition which McCord touches upon but does not stress adequately was the inefficiency of both civilian administration and military support services in supplying the commanding officers with their necessary inputs – literate and trained recruits, supplies, weapons, and financing. Such inefficiency closed off massive mobilization as a possible response by the national leaders to civil war. As a result of this constraint, the bargaining power of the existing forces and field commanders steadily increased, eventually allowing them to break free of the control of their ostensible patrons, whether it be Beiyang commanders in Beijing or Sun Yat-sen in Canton. Still, *The Power of the Gun*, with its focus on a specific region, rather than an individual warlord or clique, makes an important new contribution to the history of military politics in the warlord republic.

Indiana University

Christopher Atwood

Elder, John: *Following the Brush: An American Encounter with Classical Japanese Culture*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), x + 166 pp., pbk \$ 12.00. ISBN 0-8070-5907-2.

John Elder offers an engaging presentation of some of his personal “encounters with Japan’s living traditions” as a “sympathetic nonexpert.” (p. 11) He is well read in his avocation, studied Japanese for two years at Middlebury College, his home institution (English), and made a brief study tour to Japan in 1987 before taking advantage of an opportunity to spend a sabbatical year in Kyoto (1990–1991) with his family. His principal concerns were to study calligraphy and to improve his ability in the game of *go*, but he also deals with the Noh theatre, and more briefly with *kendô* and painting. In a different vein, he describes negotiations to get his three children accepted into the Kiyomizu Elementary School and offers his views on whaling and ecological hazards (the only times he mounts the pulpit, albeit in a subdued and thoughtful way). He closes with a charming description of his son playing cat’s cradle with a stranger on a train.

It seems to have been an enormously instructive year for Elder, with virtually every experience provoking comparison with the values, perspectives, and techniques he has absorbed as an American. His calligraphy lessons, for example, consisted mostly of taking home his exercise book and copying over and over and over the Chinese characters his instructor had drawn as examples. The sessions were quite formal and verbal interaction was minimal, but the *sensei* would indicate when a *kanji* was acceptably written and would trace over his more flawed efforts in red ink. The instructional technique did not seem very efficient, given the time it took him to figure out details that could have been explained readily enough through a few words of guidance. Eventually, however, he learned to appreciate the advantages of the nondirective teaching that “bestowed a practice centered in looking and doing, not in thinking,” releasing him “from the analytical nexus that so easily turns impulses into calculations.” (p. 21) Elder provides some illustrative characters and, as he does with all his topics, provides about the right amount of philosophical and historical background to suit the casual reader.