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Review of Douglas R. Reynolds, *China, 1898-1912: The Xinzheng Revolution and Japan*

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Comments

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Reynolds, Douglas R: *China, 1898–1912: The Xinzheng Revolution and Japan*. (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1993), xxiv + 308 pp., \$ 32.00. ISBN 0-674-11660-7.

In *China, 1898–1912*, Douglas Reynolds argues that the Xinzheng reforms of 1901 to 1910 ushered in a real revolution in Chinese governance, one that set the pattern for its subsequent development in the twentieth century. It was in fact a 'Xinzheng Revolution,' a massive top-down reform movement much like Japan's Meiji transformation. Reynolds also argues that from 1898 to 1908 China experienced a 'Golden Decade' in its relations with Japan. A massive wave of Chinese students studying in Japan and a large number of Japanese experts working in China facilitated an unprecedented transfer of ideas, institutions, and vocabulary from Japan to China. Finally, he links up his two theses by asserting that the Golden Decade was the necessary precondition of the Xinzheng Revolution. He thus implies that Japanese aid and example was *the* crucial factor in the modernization of China.

Reynolds approaches his topic with an implicit confidence in the transparency and usefulness of the concept of 'modernity' as opposed to 'tradition.' He also defines revolution as primarily a paradigm-shift in intellectual and institutional presuppositions rather than a violent overturning of previous political or class relations. The combination of these two approaches leads him to focus much more strongly on centrally-decreed political reforms and changes in vocabulary than on the shifts in local structures of elite dominance that have occupied other historians of the period. Indeed, Reynolds completely bypasses the issues of center versus periphery and the influence of reforms on local patterns of hegemony.

Reynolds argues his 'Golden Decade' thesis persuasively. Drawing together a wide variety of secondary literature and published documentary sources, he convincingly demonstrates the intense and fruitful interaction between China and Japan from 1898 to 1908. His discussion of the massive influx of Japanese vocabulary into modern Chinese is aided by the excellent and comprehensive glossary-index. The 'Xinzheng Revolution' thesis, however, remains less convincing. While Reynolds does document massive rapid change in administrative and intellectual structures, his narrow institutional focus makes it harder to evaluate their significance in the transformation of China as a whole. These reforms did indeed become the basis of the succeeding Chinese Republic, but the Republic itself was hardly the confident and powerful state that the reforms were intended to produce. If, as Reynolds strongly implies, the Xinzheng Revolution was the Chinese equivalent of the Meiji Restoration, why was the Qing regime and the Chinese state not strengthened by it as Japan was? Or to put it another way, if the Xinzheng Revolution was such a success, whence the Xinhai Revolution?

Nor does Reynolds successfully demonstrate a causal link between his two theses. He asserts that without Japan's trailblazing role in adapting Western institutions and political vocabulary to an East Asian context China could not have modernized so much and so fast. This assertion of course begs the question of how Japan itself modernized so rapidly. Nor does he argue in any detail why previous Chinese attempts at direct assimilation of Western experience were

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.

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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