Book Reviews


The Overseas Chinese and the “Anti-Japanese War” is one of the core issues in the study of overseas Chinese history on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. Since the 1980s, new sources have been discovered and a large number of works published on the subject. However, the research on both sides has been dominated by a China-oriented framework that focuses on overseas Chinese nationalism and the contributions of the overseas Chinese to their motherland. This book is a new addition to the scholarship in this field and an attempt at breaking new ground with a view to enhancing one’s understanding of overseas Chinese history.

The focus of the book is on the divergence of political identification among the overseas Chinese in their response to the opposing political agendas pursued by Chinese political figures during World War II. While Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) and his nationalist government insisted on “rebuilding China through fighting against Japan,” Wang Jingwei proposed “to save China through cooperation with the Japanese.” It discusses how these two political groups competed with each other in mobilizing the overseas Chinese and gaining their political and financial support, and how the latter responded in different ways to their overtures and rallying calls. As such, it provides us with a vivid picture of one episode of overseas Chinese history that was fraught with tension and complexity.

This book has six chapters in addition to Introduction and Conclusion. Chapter 1 is a general introduction of the native-places/hometowns of the overseas Chinese in South China, the overseas Chinese communities located in different countries, the diplomatic relations between their adopted countries and both China and Japan before the War, as well as Japan’s overall strategy for military expansion. These are regarded by the author as the major factors affecting the political options of the overseas Chinese. Chapters 2 and 3 introduce various apparatuses in both the nationalist government and the Wang regime that took charge of overseas Chinese affairs and their efforts in mobilizing the overseas Chinese. Chapter 4 is the most fascinating part of the book. The author uses a lot of original materials, such as newspaper reports, to rebut the arguments of the nationalist government and the Wang regime. She also assesses the methods and consequences of the two regimes’ activities in persuading and mobilizing the
overseas Chinese. The last two chapters describe the anti-Japanese and pro-Japanese activities of the overseas Chinese and analyze the reasons for the emergence of pro-Japanese attitudes and activities. For the first time here is a book that provides a systematic account of the policies of the Wang regime toward the overseas Chinese and their impact on the community; it fills a gap in our knowledge of the history of the overseas Chinese.

This book distinguishes itself from its predecessors in a number of significant ways. First, in contrast to previous works that took the overseas Chinese as a homogeneous entity, this book pays attention to the differences among the overseas Chinese in terms of place of settlement, dialect-group affiliation, social class, educational level and so on, and highlights the diverse political identifications within the community. The author identifies four types of overseas Chinese based on their political orientations during the War. Type one consists of the Chinese from the Philippines, Malaya, Burma, Dutch East Indies and Hong Kong. They all took part zealously in anti-Japanese activities before the War, but became inactive after their adopted countries were invaded and occupied by Japan. Type two is made up of the Chinese from the Indochinese peninsula and Macau. Because the colonial rulers surrendered to Japan in the early part of the War and also because the Japanese took this region as a strategic base for further military expansion, a relatively large number of overseas Chinese in this region adopted a pro-Japanese stance. Type three comprises the Chinese from Thailand, Japan and Taiwan, countries and areas that either adopted a pro-Japan policy or were under the direct control of the Japanese. As such, most Chinese here were in the pro-Japanese camp. Type four refers to the Chinese from America, Australia and Africa, who held a clear-cut anti-Japanese attitude throughout the war period.

Second, in contrast to the China-oriented approach found in most previous studies, the author presents the overseas Chinese as “the real leading actor” (p.12), and approaches the topic “from the angle of the overseas Chinese” (p. 8). She scrutinizes the specific historical conditions under which the overseas Chinese made their political choices. For example, borrowing Tsai Jung-fang’s classification of the Hong Kong Chinese during the War, the author identifies four types of overseas Chinese in the pro-Japanese camp. The first consists of those who submitted passively to the Japanese (消极被动者); the second comprises those who took this stand of their own accord (积极主动者); the third is made up of those who genuinely and whole-heartedly sided with the Japanese (真心诚意者), and the fourth comprises patriots in collaboration with the enemies (与敌人合作的爱国主义者) (p. 263).

Another feature worth mentioning is the unusual methodology of the research. On the one hand, the author uses a large number of archives and original materials to back up her account and analysis. These include the original documents kept in the GMD (Guomindang) historical Archives (Taipei), Academia Historica