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The Eagle and the Dragon: The United States Military in China, 1901-1937

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ultimately because they involved “two distant cultures talking past each other.” The author also traces the lengthy if somewhat fainthearted and ultimately stillborn U.S. efforts to mediate the dispute between China and France over the French seizure of Tonkin.

The second part of the book deals with the diplomacy revolving around Japan’s advance into China and particularly into Indochina in the years prior to Pearl Harbor. While Miller’s extensive research in the State Department archives turned up little that is new, the focus from a Vietnam perspective on the runup to World War II is interesting. In Vichy-controlled and Japanese-occupied Vietnam, U.S. opposition to both Japanese and German conquests coincided. An area that had been of only marginal interest to the United States for 150 years suddenly became the focus of attention to Washington policy-makers, not for any intrinsic value but because of the threat it represented in the hands of the Japanese to a perceived vital interest, China. Japan’s tightening grip on Vietnam in 1941 was a major obstacle to Japanese-U.S. discussions and led American leaders to take seriously at last the possibility of war with Japan.

Pari passu this book also raises a number of interesting counterfactual questions: what if the United States had not stuck so long to its policies of “principled non-interference” and “parallel but independent” action in Asia but had instead been prepared to listen to appeals from European

colonial powers to act in concert or at least make a commitment that the Japanese might construe as threatening the use of force? Would the Japanese have then been deterred, and for how long? Could Japan have created a serious political problem for the United States and the allies if it had seized French, Dutch, and British colonies in Asia, but left Hawaii and the Philippines alone? On the other hand, if Japan had been prepared to do a deal with our European allies, would they have sold out China to avoid war in Asia and, with luck keep their colonies? While we cannot know the answers to these questions, Miller is certainly right in concluding that “the inability or unwillingness of the United States to oppose Japan’s southward expansion discouraged the European colonial powers from devoting a higher priority to protecting their colonial possessions in the Far East, especially in the face of the German menace to Europe. This made the Japanese conquest of Southeast Asia virtually inevitable.”

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Noble, Dennis L. *The Eagle and the Dragon: The United States Military in China, 1901-1937*. New York: Greenwood, 1990. 219pp. \$39.95
American military men have served in many areas around the world for over two hundred years. Few duty stations, however, have involved the cultural dilemmas and complexity of mission that the Middle Kingdom presented

to the U.S. military forces serving there. The title of this work implies a study of the U.S. military role in the broad sweep of Sino-American relations. This is not the case. Instead, the work gives a rather narrow if fascinating view of the U.S. military's involvement in China for over thirty-seven years.

Dennis L. Noble is a part-time instructor at Peninsula College and the author of a number of articles and books about the U.S. Coast Guard. In this work he has examined the social aspects of the American military experience of serving at a distant station during peacetime. This book, he writes, "offers the student of American military history the chance to learn about the people within the ranks, rather than the larger issues of tactical doctrine, strategy, or even war plans." He has included a statistical analysis of the officers and men in the China service, a profile of the duty day, off-duty hours, American servicemen's perception of China and the Chinese, servicemen who remained in China, and incidents that required a show of force.

The author has employed a rather tiresome method of developing both his chapters and what we learn about the military forces by using what most small unit leaders learn in their first months in command. Each chapter opens with a description of a stereotype or a myth that relates to each topic. This becomes the chapter research question, which is invariably answered with both a confirmation and a refutation. For example, to

conclude that there were good and bad men in the China service, that commanders make the difference between good and mediocre units, or that living in an enclave in a foreign land does very little to increase cross-cultural understanding, is less than surprising, it is stating the obvious.

The author's assertion that "in many ways, the American military wasted its China experience, [that] U.S. military personnel should have learned as much about China as possible, in order to recognize incorrect estimates of its leaders and events later on," is off the mark. The U.S. Army's 15th Infantry, the 3rd Marine Brigade, and the 4th Marine Regiment produced a number of capable China experts and senior officers with a good understanding of China and the Chinese; these included Generals George C. Marshall and Matthew B. Ridgway and Colonel David D. Barrett, to name a few.

Despite its shortcomings, Noble's book is an interesting one for those interested in China. It does provide useful impressions of military service in culturally different lands; more importantly, however, it is an informative (if impressionistic) glimpse of China during a time of ferment.

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