

*Saving the Nation – Economic Modernity in Republican China.*

By Margherita Zanasi. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. Pp. 336. ISBN 978-0-226-97873-4.

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China's nation-building effort during the Nanjing Decade has long been a fascinating topic in the study of modern Chinese history. But scholars have usually concentrated on how the Guomindang (GMD) government, led by Jiang Jieshi, tried, succeeded or failed in accomplishing China's political unification and economic modernization. There has been hardly any volume in English that has given a complete overview of the economic policy debates and the actual practices of the different policies carried out by different political factions within the GMD government during this period. Zanasi's book adds an important new dimension to our understanding of the Nanjing Decade by focusing on the notions and activities of the Wang group (the political group that rallied around Wang Jingwei) and presenting the political complexity of the GMD government.

The author believes that "it is the idea of what constitutes a modern nation that leads nation builders to shape national institutions and a national economy, and not vice versa" (p. 1). Therefore, she first describes the deeply divided notions held by Jiang Jieshi and the Wang Group on many crucial issues concerning China's economic modernity and nation-building efforts. According to the author, Jiang, inspired by Prussia and Germany, favored an authoritarian militarist model and subordinated the economy to the military needs of the nation. The Wang group, a civilian faction within the GMD government, however, favored establishing a *minzu* (national and nationalist) economy, an economy not compromised by foreign imperialism, as the foundation of China's modern nationhood. Borrowing some language and logic of Italian fascism, the Wang group advocated the achievement of national autarky and the two correlated notions of corporativism and productivism, thus providing an alternative way to build China's autarky. It was also a better way to solve China's rural poverty and crisis by transferring to the rural areas technologies and modern business practices that had already developed in the urban centers.

The different notions of modern nationhood and nation building shaped the institutions of the Nationalist state and the reforms launched by the Nanjing government. Taking the National Economic Council (NEC) as a case study, the author considers that the NEC reform agenda came to resemble that of the Wang group and the Wang idea of the *minzu* economy. It led NEC leaders to embrace corporativism and productivism and turned the NEC into the main vehicle for the realization of the Wang group's program.

Not only had the Wang group a nation-building plan different from that of Jiang Jieshi but it had also translated it into actual reforms. The author explores in detail the reforms carried out by the NEC, particularly the Cotton Control Commission (CCC), in both rural and urban areas. In rural areas, the CCC tried to change the socioeconomic structure of the Chinese village; while in the city, it tried to mediate between labor and capital and improve production and management in cotton milling. In both areas, the CCC was working to institutionalize the joint state-private economic reform pattern initiated in the late Qing. Opposing Jiang's desire to marginalize this group in the Nationalist reconstruction effort, the NEC leaders attempted to develop a constructive relationship with the Jiangnan industrial elite by creating an official channel for private business to participate in national reform and China's nation-building efforts. Though these efforts largely failed in the end, they did "resonate with the discourse on economic modernization and the strengthening of China . . . and [were] bound to have been more appealing to Chinese intellectual and economic elites than one based on military power" (p. 233). When Jiang Jieshi "silenced the Wang group . . . he deprived the

GMD of a political platform that had the potential to steal some thunder from Mao's New Democracy, the policy that was largely responsible for the CCP's success" (p. 232). The author even "speculate[s] as to whether the reform path attempted by the Wang-Song group in 1932–35 would have been more successful in the domestic struggle against the CCP" (p. 226).

In describing the notions and practices of the nation-building efforts led by the Wang group, the author challenges quite a few established scholarly theses. While most scholars thought the rivalry between Wang and Jiang was merely a struggle for personal power, the author insists that this conclusion is "devoid of significant political implications." In reality, the rivalry between Jiang and Wang "was based to a large extent on important differences in their visions of nation building and modern nationhood" (p. 7). The author also criticizes the commonly accepted view that the GMD government leaders' ideas and economic plans that appeared during the 1930s were "unscientific and inexact reasoning, [and] can hardly be regarded as the product of scholarly or scientific analysis." Actually, the author believes that this kind of negative criticism "represents a failure to understand tropes and language that differed from those prevailing in the United States and many European countries" (p. 51). More interestingly, the author reiterates many times in her book that the confrontation between Jiang Jieshi and the Wang group was of particular importance to the future of China because their viewpoints also revolved around issues that remain fundamental today.

Since this is the first book to explore the Nanjing decade from a new angle, it is understandable that it has left unsolved many questions for further research. The following issues merit the author's further concern.

First, even though Wang Jingwei was nominally the head of the GMD government for several years, he and many Wang group members, including Chen Gongbo, had very little power, and in particular, extremely few financial sources to carry out any serious economic plan. As Minister of Industry, Chen Gongbo did promulgate many ambitious industrial plans during his tenure. However, they all remained on paper only. The author must be aware of this fact since most of the case studies she cites to explain the Wang group's alternative nation-building efforts were actually conducted by Song Ziwen and his NEC, CCC and other institutions. Though Song had a serious conflict with Jiang Jieshi over many issues, it is hard to say that he belonged to the Wang group.

Second, the author criticizes other scholars who "describe Wang as [a] political opportunist" and consider this to be the main motivation of his actions as "a very limited view of the complex combination of factors that inspired Wang's career" (p. 204). Using arguments presented by the Wang group (particularly Chen Gongbo, Chen Biquan and Zhou Fohai) at their trials after the war, the author gives the readers an impression that their collaboration with the Japanese was a logical extension of "the strategy of nation building pursued by Wang Jianwei and Chen Gongbo and their criticism of Jiang's military nation building" (p. 227). During the war, the Wang group did fight with the Japanese to take "control of [Chinese] resources" (pp. 214–16) and tried to "preserve the vitality of (China)" (pp. 211–14). But the arguments are still not convincing enough. As an experienced politician, Wang must have known that there was no hope that his government could build an autarky and turn China into a modern country under Japanese control. Maybe other factors did contribute to Wang's collaboration with the Japanese, but the main motivation for his actions was actually "his political opportunis[m] and lack of nationalism."

It also unfair to say "Jiang did not really intend to use his military apparatus to resist Japan – a task he was leaving to the United States – but mostly aimed it at consolidating his political control domestically by defeating the Communists" (p. 225). As many studies demonstrate, Jiang did send his best troops to fight the Japanese army in the first stage of the war. Jiang had no way to rely on American help in dealing with the Japanese attack in the first several years of the war since America had never promised to join the war in the Far East before Japan launched the Pacific War in December 1941.

In summary, the book has filled a certain void in the study of the Nanjing Decade. But, as the author herself points out, the complexity of the Nanjing government “deserves a much more extensive and comprehensive study.”

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*Narrating China: Jia Pingwa and His Fictional World.*

By Yiyang Wang. London and New York: Routledge, 2006. Pp. x + 318. ISBN 0415326753. Cloth. \$97.00.

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With ten full-length novels, many volumes of short stories and essays, and a considerable amount of poetry to his name, not to mention the significant body of scholarship dedicated to the study of his oeuvre, Jia Pingwa 賈平凹 (b. 1952) has emerged as one of the most important literary figures in China during the post-Mao era. Jia's dogged devotion to his home province of Shaanxi, and all the linguistic and cultural minutiae that that entails, have helped situate Jia as an author of rare, if not entirely unique, talent. His work has attracted the critical attention of a wide variety of Chinese and Japanese intellectuals, though the research in English, with fewer than a dozen published articles and book chapters by my account, has lagged until now. And only one of his novels to date has been translated into English. Thus, Yiyang Wang's single-author study is more than a welcome addition; it has now set the standard for all Jia Pingwa studies in Western languages. While comprehensive treatments of his work exist in Chinese, *Narrating China* is the first such work in a Western language, and a superb one at that. Indeed, in general, single-author treatments of modern Chinese literary figures are discouraged by publishers on the justification that they will not sell as well as thematic works, works of literary history, or works on groups of writers or literary movements. This is disheartening because modern Chinese literary studies are finally reaching a period of maturation, both in terms of subject matter and the academic field, that behooves us to produce more specialized, detailed, and focused secondary works in the way that scholars of English and European literatures, and even of Japanese literature, are able to do – and, most important, to get them published.

*Narrating China* is a book in ten chapters with a conclusion and several appendices as well as a comprehensive bibliography. It is meticulously researched and gives the reader the impression that the author has read all of Jia's work available at the time of writing in addition to all the Jia scholarship in Chinese (not Japanese). The first two chapters lay the groundwork for the several chapters to follow, which are devoted to one extent or another to each of Jia's novels and, to a lesser extent, to his poetry and prose. Wang spends a particularly large portion of her book on the analysis of Jia's *Feidu*, which she translates somewhat idiosyncratically as *Defunct Capital*. I can only presume that we are to gather from this that she views it as his most important work. It certainly is the one that has generated the most controversy and discussion, not all of it (to say the least) positive.

The book begins with an introduction which, after a brief exposition of the tendency of Jia to include autobiographical elements in his texts and his self-avowed role as a “peasant writer,” turns to a detailed and thoughtful examination of Jia's status as a “nativist” 鄉土 author. Wang then unveils an extensive account of the history of nativist literature in modern Chinese literary history. This sketch includes sections on Lu Xun, Lao She, Shen Congwen, CCP dogma, and at least briefly mentions the contributions of several other writers. It also takes into consideration scholarship written on the topic, both in English and Chinese. There is scant reference to Taiwan's well-known and well-documented nativist literary debates and reputed exponents of Taiwanese nativism, such as Huang Chunming, Chen Yingzhen or Wang Zhenhe, all of whom wrote in Chinese, a point I will return to at the end of this review. Wang concludes this line of argument by situating Jia Pingwa