

far they can go in creating a new religious infrastructure for Confucianism in contemporary China.

The paradox of both being recognized as a world religion in history and during interreligious dialogues on the one hand, and not being treated as a religion by the majority of contemporary Chinese people on the other, reflects a cultural division between Western and Eastern understandings of what religion is or what we expect religion to be. The religiosity of Confucianism poses a challenge to all people who study Chinese religion and culture. Anna Sun takes on this challenge admirably and clears up certain hurdles and barriers that prevent us from finding an adequate answer. While we must not expect any single research project to solve all of the problems facing Confucianism as (or not) a world religion, Sun's scholarly effort is a most welcome contribution to our understanding of historical and contemporary construction and reconstruction of Confucianism in China and beyond.

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KENNETH M. SWOPE:

The Military Collapse of China's Ming Dynasty, 1618–1644.

(Routledge Asian States and Empires.) xv, 291 pp. London and

New York: Routledge, 2014. £95. ISBN 978 0 415 44927 4.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X14000913

This monograph continues Kenneth Swope's research into the military dimensions of late Ming history, which commenced with his dissertation and continued with his full-length study *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail* (Norman, 2009) in conjunction with numerous articles which have appeared across the 2000s and 2010s. The leitmotif running through most of Swope's scholarly work is a historiographical reinterpretation of the past in which the late Ming military is rehabilitated as a capable force able successfully to fight multiple wars simultaneously in the late sixteenth century. In this reviewer's opinion, Swope has argued this point relatively convincingly, in the event also highlighting the role of the Wanli (r. 1572–1620) emperor and his mentor grand secretary Zhang Juzheng (1525–82) as patrons of talented army officers and civil officials with a modicum of military aptitude. They used them as effective counterweights to the civil bureaucratic factionalism often obstructing efficient governance during the later years of the dynasty. With this viewpoint positively reinterpreting the oft-maligned reign of the Wanli emperor, Swope's research meshes well with that of David Robinson, who has posited the commendable argument that our views of the Ming army and the Ming emperors have been unduly influenced by the voluminous writings of the civil officials, who in the end formed but one interest group among many.

In this book documenting the military history of the Ming collapse, Swope endeavours to answer the question why the empire ceased existing in 1644, despite reaching new heights of martial excellency only decades before. The story of the Ming decline has been told before by, for example, such luminaries as Lynn Struve and Frederic Wakeman Jr. Swope nevertheless claims to bring three new aspects to the table: a Ming court-centred approach, a focus on the military side of the story, and a wealth of hitherto little-known or explored primary source materials. With regard to the primary sources, a cursory read of the first seven chapters makes it abundantly clear that Swope has done a sterling job uncovering much of

the written legacy documenting the fall of the Ming. This legacy is put to excellent use narrating the various military dimensions of the empire's demise in minute detail, painted in lively verbal colours. Swope succeeds in bringing the various characters back to life on his narrative canvas and thankfully provides a mini biographical dictionary of sorts at the end, which helps the reader keep track of the rather voluminous cast.

Concerning the other two novel perspectives of the Ming court and the military, I have to say the results are slightly less spectacular, if still significant. The main problem with this monograph is that the analyses are often not as thorough as perhaps they could be, and therefore some opportunities are missed. For example, Swope posits that the main reason for the military failure of the court to stave off the empire's destruction at the hands of both peasant rebels and Manchu invaders was its inability to detect and nurture talented military leaders and balance the civil and military branches of government. Hence, in this monograph Emperor Chongzhen (r. 1627–44) stands in stark contrast to his forebear Wanli when it comes to human resources management skills. Chongzhen, being well-meaning but paranoid about factionalism at the court, is allocated much of the blame by Swope for failing to recognize and support the right military leaders. In my opinion, Swope assigns too much agency to the court in this matter. In the introduction the author cites Kai Filipiak and Kathleen Ryor, both of whom have detected the autonomous rise of a new military elite, consisting of hereditary military officers and military-minded civil officials, in the mid-sixteenth century. This group provided much of the cohesion and leadership which solved many of the military crises in the second half of the sixteenth century, but it apparently emerged on the south-eastern coastal littoral largely of its own accord in response to the piracy crisis of the 1550s. Interestingly, Swope uncovers hints pointing towards a renewed distancing of civil and military officials. For example on page 50 a civil official is cited complaining of an empire-wide overemphasis on military men. Sadly, however, this notion is not explored further and in any case Swope does not always clarify if a named involved government functionary is a civil official with military responsibilities, or a hereditary military official. This makes it hard to determine if anything like a combined civil–military elite still existed at this time. Since the court was initially only ephemerally involved in the formation and patronage of this new elite, the answer to the question of what happened to this fruitful civil–military rapprochement in the seventeenth century should perhaps be sought in a broader context than merely court management.

Concerning the military dimension, the author uncovers intriguing data on the employment of chariots in conjunction with firearms against mobile Manchu cavalry, as well as the regional specialization of weapon production. It is my hope that the author will explore these issues further in forthcoming articles, as there are fruitful global comparisons to be made concerning these tactical and technological phenomena in the wider Eurasian context.

As a concluding remark I must add that this monograph reinforced my view that the fall of the Ming empire was in no way inevitable and attributable to incorrigible structural shortcomings. I agree with Swope that a more consistent personnel management policy by a more trustful and forceful monarch could probably have made a difference, but in the end it seems that an unfortunate and overwhelming combination of natural disasters, ambitious external usurpers of the heavenly mandate, and internal rebellions put an end to one of the most stable and enduring dynasties in China's imperial history.

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