legal standards on anti-discrimination into the Chinese legal order. In Norway and Denmark, incorporation of international law standards on gender equality has faced challenges due to a critique of the “anti-democratic” nature of human rights in judicializing issues that might previously have been decided through democratic processes, Skjeie writes. Yet broader definitions of democracy require that the needs of groups and individuals vulnerable to discrimination be addressed, and incorporation is generally effective in doing this, she argues.

In their introduction to the volume, Stoltz and Svensson provide an overview of the main concepts the book sets out to address, while also trying to bring together its disparate elements. Beyond this effort, while many of the chapters in the book are of high quality, few reflect the “dialogue” the editors say was “at the heart of the meeting” that gave rise to them (1), or the comparative analysis that the editors argue can be most productive in theorizing that goes beyond the experience of the West. The volume situates its terrain in a set of concepts that have predominantly been explored in the Western academy: gender, citizenship and human rights. In China, these are marginal in academic terms, yet have enormous significance as subjects of activist politics. This makes efforts to converse in book form very challenging. One is left wishing for a chance to eavesdrop on the conversations that actually occurred at the conference.

The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

SOPHIA WOODMAN


Books about the European front in World War II continue to pour from the presses. Even the Pacific War, particularly the American struggle with Japan, has been well covered. But the English-language scholarship on the China Theatre has been much scantier, particularly for social history. This situation has begun to change in the last two decades, as a result of historiographical revisionism by a group of scholars in East Asia as well as the West. Diana Lary has become one of the best-known historians in this field with her writings on previously little-analyzed events during the Sino-Japanese War of 1937-45, including the savage battle of Xuzhou in 1938 and the blasting of the Yellow River Dykes by the Nationalist government in the same year. Her new book brings together various
aspects of her groundbreaking research as part of the appropriately-named Cambridge series on New Approaches to Asian History.

The book uses a chronological structure to examine some of the most wrenching events in the social history of the war against Japan. It concentrates largely on the areas controlled by the Nationalist (Guomindang) government, although the parts of China under the control of the Communists and collaborationist governments are also covered. Lary uses a highly creative range of primary sources to illustrate the wrenching effect that the outbreak of war with Japan had on China in July 1937, including newspaper reports, memoirs and even songs and jokes. The picture of wartime China that emerges is a grim one. One by one, Lary illustrates the themes that made the war years so destructive to the fabric of Chinese society. For those who fled to the western part of China, the prospect of constant terror bombing, particularly in the temporary capital at Chongqing, made it hard to create a stable society in exile. From 1942 onward, the cavalier use of the printing press along with the growing scarcity of goods led to massive hyperinflation, ruining the finances of all those, including government officials and teachers, who were dependent on money keeping its value to make their household accounts add up. And in the occupied areas of rural China, the possibility of Japanese revenge attacks against Communist guerrillas made aiding the resistance a dangerous game indeed. Particularly original are the sections dealing with the “natural” disasters that affected China because of the war, in particular the flooding of large areas of farmland after the deliberate breach of the Yellow River dykes in 1938 (done to stop the Japanese advance in central China), and the massive famine in Henan province, where a combination of economic hardship and short-sighted official policy led to the deaths by starvation of some two to four million Chinese. Overall, one of the most disturbing aspects of the book is the extent to which Chinese, not just Japanese, decisions led to the impoverishment and atomization of the population, although the ultimate responsibility of the Japanese in invading China is never forgotten.

The book is written in a fluid and accessible style, and among the highlights are the thoughtfully chosen extracts from literary works of the period. As one of the primary aims of the book is to educate university students not familiar with the war and its consequences (perhaps as part of a wider course on global World War II), this makes it a valuable teaching tool.

There are some areas where other scholars may interpret events differently from the author. Early on, it is argued (20) that the outbreak of war in China evinced “little interest or sympathy” in the rest of the world. This is perhaps a little harsh on the global community of the time.
It is certainly true that China was left to fight in 1937 with very little formal assistance (bar an agreement with the USSR for some limited support). However, the outbreak of war did give rise to a wave of popular support across the West. The China Campaign Committee in Britain was just one example of that sympathy; and major cultural figures including Robert Capa, W.H. Auden, and Henri Cartier-Bresson all brought their talents with words and pictures to bear, transmitting the horror of the invasion to a shocked global public. This helped pave the way for the eventual acceptance of China as a wartime ally after Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Overall, readers will find in this book a powerful and moving portrait of events that have for too long been forgotten by Western historiography. It admirably achieves its aim of demonstrating that the war against Japan was one of the “pivotal events of modern Chinese history” and not merely a staging-post toward an eventual Communist victory.

University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom

RANA MITTER


This volume is the reissue of a book first published in 1982. The only apparent change in the second edition is a new preface written by the author, Anthony B. Chan. The preface adds to the first edition by pointing out (including, I should disclose, by citing my own comparative work) that the Chinese case fits a pattern of warlordism that is now manifest in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Chan moves the broader study of the warlord phenomenon forward by noting that warlords can only flourish when someone sells them guns. He argues that warlords should be considered through the lens of “critical militarism,” which in his words “reveals the almost omnipotent presence of transnational arms dealers and corporations with the complicity of foreign governments at the apex of the arms trade” (xvi). He provides a valuable service by redirecting the attention of current scholars to the arms trade that supports warlordism. That perspective is usually missing from today’s discussions of warlordism in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Chan makes clear that policy makers would do well to pay more attention to the trade in guns as an enabler of state weakness.

In the rest of the (1982-issued) volume, Chan usefully describes the web of Western (and Japanese) financial assistance, arms sales and trainers who supported Chinese warlordism in the 1920s. He argues that