

**Review of Panagiotis Dimitrakis, *The Secret War for China: Espionage, Revolution and the Rise of Mao* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017).**

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Panagiotis Dimitrakis has clearly had a lot of fun compiling this book, which ranges restlessly through a quarter-century of intelligence history in China as revealed in US and British archives and a tranche of secondary scholarly literature. Although the book is flawed by an unwillingness to advance a thesis or even stick to a main idea (other than 'anything having to do with spying'), the sheer volume of unique anecdotes and research passion on display make it a worthwhile resource for historians.

For the historian seeking to impose clarity on the overlapping conflicts which occurred in China from 1927-1952 --the years which the author selects for analysis -- a number of markers or key themes exist which take the Kuomintang/Guomindang (KMT or Nationalist Party, led by Chiang Kai-shek) as a baseline. These themes include consolidation of the Republican regime, trade and finance and the foreign concessions, the interaction among Nationalist elites with global discourse, preparations for war with Japan, the war with Japan itself, anti-Japanese nationalism, relations with the US and USSR, Chiang Kai-shek as symbol and personality, the 'third battlefield' of urban areas and universities, and ultimately the December 1936 'united front' with the Chinese Communist Party which ended up reverting to civil war in 1945-46. A more Mao-centred approach is another means of handling the period, particularly given that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took power in 1949; here big themes and events include the Long March of 1935-36 and the emergence of Mao Zedong as leader, Maoist guerrilla strategy in the anti-Japanese war, land reform and rural violence, the transition to mobile warfare during the massive campaigns in Manchuria in 1946-48, relations with the US and USSR, the role of women in revolution, and foreigners assisting the CCP, and of course interaction with the global Cold War. Hans Van de Ven's ambitious book on military conflict in China from 1937-52 is a text that tries to sweep much of this in, but focusing on a longer period spanning the consolidation, resistance, and end of one Chinese regime on the mainland and juxtaposing it with the rise of another from within is exceptionally difficult.

The subtitle of this book (Espionage, Revolution, and the Rise of Mao) indicates that the CCP might be at the core of the narrative, but this is really not the case at all. Mao is a side player, and Dimitrakis has produced a work that is clearly more in the vintage of Frederick Wakeman's *Spymaster: Dai Li and the Chinese Secret Service* but with greater focus on British intelligence along the lines of the late Keith Jeffry's *MI6* history. What interests the author is not so much the architecture or the political goals at play, but the actions of individual spies getting into mischief. The book is absolutely packed with little revelations, nuggets from the archives, plans that never came to fruition, colourful personalities who glimmer up and then disappear, bureaucratic clashes and international intrigue, along with a handful of insights into how leaders in given countries concerned with China may have sought to further national interest via espionage.

Dimitrakis is in his element, then, in describing Anglo-American tensions over spy operations based in China's wartime capital of Chongqing/Chungking. In Chapter 8, focusing on the difficulty of British intelligence agencies operating in China, Dimitrakis notes: 'British intelligence could not cope with the intelligence requirements for the coverage of the Sino-Japanese war...[and] throughout the interwar the SIS (MI6) had meagre secret sources in Asia' (101-102). Britain's spies in the Far East were more focused on perceived internal Chinese threats (both communist and nationalist) in colonies like Hong Kong and Singapore than they were on assessing Japanese moves in the region. Even once the war between China and Japan kicked off in earnest in summer 1937, British agents were more reliant on traders coming into Hong Kong from war zones than they were on outward-reaching missions.

Winston Churchill had attempted to change this with the establishment of the Special Operations Executive (SOE) which, in its East Asian manifestation, looked forward to establishing agents in areas likely to be occupied by Japan, doing so in tandem with the Chinese Nationalist spymaster Dai Li and the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS, the forerunner of the CIA) in Chongqing. But by March 1942, British spies were frustrated by having been boxed in by the Chinese Nationalists who were fearful they would connect with local warlords and enable the capacities of the Chinese Communist Party. (It was a testament to Chiang Kai-shek's bureaucratic battling skills that the Americans only really made contact with the CCP in 1944 with the 'Dixie Mission.') As Dimitrakis describes via a document in the UK National Archives, the British suspected Dai Li of cooperation with the Nazis, calling him 'the Himmler of Free China.' Authors like Anthony Best and Richard Aldrich have covered similar terrain, and Dimitrakis' prose occasionally lapses into overly-blinkered shop talk ('the SOE did not want to allow SIS into RII'), but this is nevertheless quality work demonstrating expertise and archival fluency.

Another highlight is found in Chapter 14, in a short and able sketch of Michael Lindsay, an Oxbridge-educated economist whose invitation to teach in Beijing (then Beiping) in 1938 would lead to multiple insights for British intelligence. Dimitrakis describes Lindsay's as 'a fascinating tale of the high-risk missions of an academic who was the only Briton with the communist underground and the guerillas' (174). Drawing liberally from Lindsay's 1975 photographic memoir (*The Unknown War, North China 1937-1945*), Dimitrakis shows how truly permeable the lines were between Japanese and Chinese armies in North China in the late 1930s. Teaching Keynes by day and sending CCP messages by night, Lindsay unfortunately lived too early to experience our current golden age of British academia where he might have found meaning in life as an 'impact case study.' Instead, he left his job for want of funding and ended up in Chongqing working at the British Embassy on another permeable boundary - namely, between press information and intelligence gathering. Like Richard Sorge in Tokyo, Lindsay was ever-hungry for better information on Japanese troop strength in Manchuria as arrayed against the bordering threat of the Soviet Red Army. Ousted from his second stint teaching in Beijing due to the Pearl Harbour attacks, Lindsay ended up with his new wife in a CCP base area in 1942 and found his way to Yanan to meet Chairman Mao before finally heading back to Britain at the close of the war, where his expertise on things Chinese received only sporadic attention from Whitehall. When focused on a single individual for a sustained treatment, Dimitrakis tells a solid story, and although

this one is not buttressed by archival finds (was there no discussion of Lindsay to be found in the National Archives at all?), it is a useful piece in the larger jigsaw puzzle of the book.

Dimitrakis' treatment of the Chinese civil war (1945-1949) is particularly sprawling. The author's failure to ever really come to terms with the architecture of Chinese politics, or to take on the Nationalist-Communist struggle absent his primary focus on British or US spies, here lends itself to a sense of incoherence in the text. In a chapter ostensibly looking at Manchuria, the pivot of the civil war, in the late summer of 1945, the author goes on a number of unrelated tangents, hopscotching around geographically anywhere but Northeast China. These episodes including a Spanish Civil War veteran in Xi'an, the OSS in Shanxi, a meeting Soong Ching-ling had in Chongqing, Nationalist spy chief Dai Li executing collaborators in Shanghai, the murder of John Birch in Shandong, a Swiss man recruited by the OSS who saw the Japanese surrender in Henan, the reorganisation of the OSS into the CIA, and the SIS operation in Tianjin. If this is 'an urgent and necessary guide to the intricacies of the Chinese Civil War', as the attractive book cover promises, then I for one am lost.

The resolute refusal by the author to link adjacent paragraphs with anything resembling transitions or logical clarity means that at times the reader has to approach the book as if it is Jean Paul Sartre's postwar fiction (*Les chemins de la liberté*) in which voice and place will jump midstream without warning, and therefore treat the text like a huge trove of sometimes fascinating, sometimes vexing anecdotes to enjoy episodically and at random. No individual is really followed through the entire text, least of all Mao or Dai Li; some reference to secondary literature to Dai Li in the introduction might really have helped, after all, why not just read Frederick Wakeman?

But this is a parsimonious way to look at a book that is, in the end, abundant with quality finds from the archives. (Indeed, I had to restrain myself from focusing this entire review on the author's stunning chapter on on US-Japanese intelligence collusion in the weeks and months after the war ended in August 1945, documentation which turns the 'defeat' narrative upside-down and suggests why the CCP went so furiously at the US-Japan collaboration theme in its propaganda throughout the civil war.) In *The Secret War for China*, Panagiotis Dimitrakis provides researchers of World War II in East Asia and historians of intelligence with hundreds of new pathways and enjoyable trapdoors to explore for themselves.