

Maggie Clinton: Revolutionary Nativism. Fascism and Culture in China, 1925–1937, Durham: Duke University Press 2017, 268 p.

Reviewed by
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When Commandant Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975) formalized the reunification of a fragmented China in 1928, he led a regime that observers have struggled to classify. Neo-Confucian authoritarian, corporatist, militarist, Leninist, fascist or fascistic are just some of the attributes that academics have bestowed upon Nationalist China's one-party rule. Author Maggie Clinton, associate professor of history at Middlebury College offers a closer examination of the eponymous *Revolutionary Nativism* disseminated by fascists within the party and around the party's vicinity during an extended pre-war Nanjing decade (1925–1937). Clinton uses the term "fascism" in the singular form, thereby arguing for similarities and synergies between different forms of militarist and technocratic ideologies. To her aim, she utilizes primary sources consisting of pamphlets, articles, speeches, and memoirs of a selected group of fascist authors. She also frequently remarks on relevant secondary literature and theories.

Clinton divides her study into five chapters. In the first chapter, she elaborates on the background of the fascistic groups, which, though not formally institutionalized by the Nationalist party, spearheaded

fascist influences within the political regime. While the CC Clique (an acronym referring either to the leading brothers Chen or meaning "Central Club") was a civil think-tank and political faction, the Blue Shirts (officially the "Three Principles Society") were a backhand militia. Clinton makes clear that both groups established and disseminated an anti-conservative, anti-communist vision of state rule and social order. The author further provides biographic introductions to their actors. Among these are Chen Guofu (1892–1951), Chen Lifu (1900–2001), Dai Jitao (1891–1949), and Xu Enzeng ("Enceng" in Clinton's transcription; 1896–1985). She gives an overview of associated journals, such as *Sweat and Blood Weekly* (*Hanxue zhoukan*), *Cultural Construction* (*Wenhua jianshe*), and *New Life* (*Xin shengming*), and contextualises their themes against the political background of the post-Sun China.

Chapter two is a careful analysis of the conservatism within pre-war fascism. As Clinton later summarises, the ideology in question was "a regional variant of fascism that [...] named Confucianism as the nation's cultural core" (p. 194). The "Janus-faced" ideology – alluding to Chinese traditions while hailing progressiveness – allowed for the utilization of a Confucian-derived system of thought which opposed the emancipation of genders and classes while at the same time envisioning a "modern," industrialist future (p. 64). Clinton then discusses links between fascism and the thought of a revered "father of the nation" Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), and how the latter was made compatible through fascist interpretations. For Clinton, Chinese fascism was "revolutionary,"

but replaced Marxist class struggle with a propagated harmony between the classes. Clinton's most compelling arguments can be found in the following chapter. It centres on the othering and dehumanization of communist insurgents. She links these efforts to cultural conflicts of gender, sexuality, and social orders. Communists were framed as inhibiting a "compromised masculinity", as sexual libertines, and as ideologically foreign (p. 112). Their immoral, beast-like behaviour would eventually justify purges, executions, and assassinations. The non-secretive nature of their punitive confinement "normalized the idea that political dissent was criminal" (p. 126).

The author then discusses the policing of the public, concentrating locally on the city of Nanchang, and thematically on the 1930s New Life Movement (*Xin shenghuo yundong*). Fascist commentators criticised dancehalls and promoted uniforms. Rationalization and subordination aimed at the nationalisation of labour. Clinton argues that the movement targeted "maximal efficiency by concentrating power in the hands of experts" and describes the ideal citizens as "cogs in a well-oiled national machine" (pp. 137–138).

The final chapter examines the fascist stance on popular culture. Chen Lifu authored a pamphlet on cinema and its use for mass propaganda. Clinton also explores the failed logic behind the 1933 kidnapping of socialist author Ding Ling (1904–1986). While the chapter remains a little short on actual examples of fascist popular fiction, it includes some of the most interesting visual material of the book. Fascist publications often drew on imaginations of a degenerate lifestyle for their magazine covers, "grant[ing] themselves license to

enjoy images that they deemed unhealthy for others" (p. 176).

The book would have profited from additional editing. The "conclusions" ending each main chapter often introduce new information instead of discussing the chapter (e.g. pp. 96–97, 188–189). A few quotes lack citation or are miscited (e.g. Sun on p. 166; p. 182, footnote 63), prominent terms are absent from the list of characters (e.g. *Wenhua jianshe*), indexed page numbers are not properly ordered (Xu, p. 268), inconsistently linked and italicized, and persons and terms are introduced more than once (e.g. Dai, pp. 27, 79; Xu, pp. 31–32, 114; Confucian bonds, pp. 86, 130, 133). Latter repetitions are owed to the (otherwise reasonable) structure of the book. Because chapters are arranged loosely by theme rather than groups or actors, threads are often abandoned and picked up later on. The Duke University layout further tarnishes the readability as there is little aid to distinguish between unnumbered subheadings and sub-subheadings.

While Clinton compares her findings to international forms of fascism and frequently contrasts them to left-wing voices in China, there is a lack of information about dissent by moderate, conservative, and cosmopolitan capitalist actors within the Nationalist camp. While communism was arguably fascism's most iconic counterdraft, it was hardly the only model fascists had to deal with.

Clinton's study serves as an important reminder that what Chinese historiography usually refers to as the "Republican era" was more complex and contested than the term conveys. It is insufficient to characterise Nationalist politics as either fragmented and incompetent or to focus solely

on the development of economy and infrastructure. The author's cultural approach of identifying and analysing fascist elements while resisting the temptation of imposing the label on the entire government will help us in developing a more differentiated understanding of China's first incarnation of one-party-rule.

For readers outside the field of Chinese history, the study provides a state-of-the-art overview of Nationalist China's fascist endeavours and invites for further comparative studies of fascist theory on a global, non-Eurocentric level. Clinton lays out a starting ground through recurring references to Hitler Germany, Fascist Italy, and US Fordism. Her portrayal of Chinese fascism as a rule of experts, with some leading figures coming from an educational background in engineering, may also act as a basis for future comparative research on technocratic governance or in reference to C. P. Snow's "two cultures" dichotomy. The general brevity of both the studied period and the study itself will allow for future researchers to focus on particular actors and publications in detail or to expand in time by exploring Chinese fascism's precursors and legacy.

Ralf Banken / Ben Wubs (eds.): The Rhine. A Transnational Economic History, Baden-Baden: Nomos 2017, 384 S.

Reviewed by
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The volume is a summary of scientific debates that took place at the first period of conferences organized by the transnational 'RHIN(e)' network. Since 2009, this network brought together scholars from different disciplines in order to bring together research on the economic history of the Rhine. The Rhine has been an economic axis, a borderline of empires, and a place for trade since ancient times. It has been and still is important for large parts of Western Europe. It was even so important for its surrounding economies that the first international organization of modern style – the Central Commission for Navigation on the Rhine (CCNR) – was set up to regulate inland navigation on the Rhine and to enhance trade alongside the river. Still today, these regions are among the most economically advanced in Europe.

The RHIN(e) network put a number of research questions on its agenda, which were also relevant to the volume to be discussed here. What exactly is the Rhine region or the Rhine economy? What are its spatial dimensions? What are its borders and did they change over time? Was the Rhine one single or different heterogeneous regions? Were the different regions like