

deal of evidence for it. His reading of the sources uncovers at the same time an involved, active, and significant place for American fathers in the middle-class home. He does a remarkably sensitive job of translating their words and worlds in the antebellum period across the threshold between family life and the world of men beyond the home.

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Rebecca E. Karl — *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002. Pp. xii, 314.

*Staging the World* explores the intellectual context of the Chinese anti-dynastic radicalism that brought millennia of rule by emperors abruptly to an end in 1911. In simplified accounts, the revolutionaries who established the Republic of China were impelled by Social Darwinist fears that the Manchu monarchy was unfit to ensure survival of the nation. Rebecca Karl's persuasive analysis, in contrast, identifies the radical anti-Manchuism of the turn of the twentieth century as part of an emerging resistance to the ideological hegemony of Euro-American imperialism in Asia and Africa.

According to simplified accounts found in both Chinese and Western historiography, China's intellectuals a century ago had been forced out of isolation by Western imperialist attacks and emerged blinking to discover a world outside their ancient Empire. They then reluctantly recognized the necessity of modernizing along Western lines and were inspired in their anti-monarchism by the French Revolution and the model of a strong republic established in the United States. Karl makes a crucial contribution to recovering the aims of Chinese radicals by revealing their sophisticated and detailed knowledge of current world affairs. She describes members of China's educated elite as such avid readers of world news that the recent history of far-flung places such as the Philippines, Poland, Turkey, and the African Transvaal provided them with analytic terms such as "to Poland" (meaning to dismember and destroy a state) with which to diagnose their own situation. Chinese radicals thus identified China's Manchu monarchy, established by an ethnically distinct group of conquerors during the seventeenth century, as a colonial power congruent with British power in India and the United States in the Philippines.

Karl's central focus is on how Chinese nationalism was constructed by observers of international affairs. She demonstrates the astuteness of Chinese radical intellectuals who were becoming keenly aware of the power of colonialist regimes to define the targets of their violence as primitive "others". Emerging sentiments of anti-statism in the news-reading radical group led to analytic links between Euro-American imperialism and China's dynastic regime, despite the fact that China's monarchy was itself the victim of Euro-American scorn. Karl makes the important argument that the intellectual leaders of China's early-twentieth-century revolutionary movement clearly distinguished "nation" and "state" in their analyses. She argues that resistance

to state hegemony was central to their construction of the nation. On this point Karl opposes what she considers to be a distorting conflation of statism and nationalism in Chinese intellectual history by many other authors, some of whom have traced China's recent repressive statism back to the origins of Chinese nationalism.

Karl's contention that early Chinese nationalism has been misinterpreted by leading scholars will make her book compelling reading for specialists in Chinese history and related fields. Readers will find much to ponder in her ambitious book, which actually contains enough substantive material to fill two or three separate monographs. Although they might question some of Karl's claims, it would be surprising if a project of such scope did not seem to rest on thin ice in a few spots.

It is striking that the book does not refer to Reuters, active in East Asia since 1872. Nowhere does the book identify the news agencies through which reports on events such as the Boer War, the crushed Philippine revolution, and the successes of the Young Turks reached Chinese readers. Had any Chinese correspondents been posted to Africa and Turkey a century ago? How the predominantly Euro-American professional journalism of the era shaped Chinese observers' understanding of the world deserves a least a mention. Sustained attention to how the news reached China, however, would require a separate book, and will perhaps be written by another author, inspired by the vistas Karl reveals.

Another shortcoming of *Staging the World* is that it downplays Chinese admiration of models of modernist power, most notably Japan, that were frequently discussed in the news a century ago. Most of the chapters are case studies of how Chinese readers interpreted news from particular places in the world where events were unfolding to reveal possible parallels and perils for China. There is no direct reference to how news about Japan's changing role on the world stage shaped Chinese radicals' generalizations about politics and historical forces. This is a striking omission given the extent to which the radicals' own sojourns and contacts in Japan, together with their access to news of the world through Japanese sources, shaped the intellectual milieu that Karl explores.

In her recovery of the nationalist and anarchist positions taken by Chinese commentators on international affairs around the turn of the twentieth century, Karl brings to light the liberating potential of early Chinese nationalism, but she seems to idealize the Chinese radicals. She acknowledges that the efforts of the Chinese intellectual elite to resist the dominant modernizationist discourse of the time were incomplete. She also notes that the radicals' views were "text-based and elitist" on the topic of a potential pan-Asian identity (p. 175). But she does not address the possibility that Chinese news-readers were always as fascinated by power as they were by movements of anti-colonial resistance. Perhaps they were as concerned about proving that the Chinese were not a primitive race as with conceptual solidarity with colonized peoples. In her exploration of a complex and contradictory discourse on China in the world, Karl has "separated out" (to use a term she is fond of) an anti-hegemonic strain. By doing so, she gives the impression that Chinese radicals a century ago were not just modernists, but actually precocious postmodernists.

The book's highlight is Karl's talent as a translator. In the course of her discussion, she skilfully translates numerous passages from her sources. As an appendix,

she provides a flawlessly flowing translation of the surviving first part of a political activist's engaging and intriguing play, performed in Shanghai in 1904. But there is a sharp contrast between Karl's skill as a translator and the awkwardness of her own prose style. The translated passages are lively oases separated by arid stretches where a reader's energy flags in the course of convoluted sentences extending to points far over the horizon. While Karl provides evocative access to the voices and concerns of Chinese writers a century ago, she also obstructs that access with her ponderously abstract meta-translation of the writers' larger discourse.

Perhaps Karl's writing is not clear because she is trying too hard to be theoretical. Part of the problem is that she reads postmodern sophistication into the minimally theoretical musings of Chinese authors of a century ago. An example of this is her discussion of Tang Tiaoding's commentary of 1903 on recent events in the Philippines (pp. 105–113). In a single paragraph of five sentences, Karl confidently claims that "Tang was perhaps on one level elaborating a model", while "at a different level, Tang also powerfully suggested" and "felt ... history could be secured" on a global stage. Karl continues with the contention that "the point for Tang ... was not so much to counterpose a 'real' history against a white-manufactured fiction", and she concludes with the statement that "Tang seemed to wish to destabilize the seeming structural certainty of the world system itself" (p. 109). Karl's reading is fascinating, and her translation makes clear that Tang Tiaoding was brilliant and well-informed. Nonetheless, she runs a risk in her attempt to read another writer's mind.

Karl's own response to these criticisms might be similar to her recent reference in a book review to "the aversion to theory of the majority of Western historians of China" (*The China Journal*, no. 49, p. 185). The response to her own book is likely to disprove that off-hand remark. Many "Western"-based specialists are actually eager to read books placing Chinese history in abstract frameworks and will peruse this one with patience and appreciation. Moreover, Karl's first book has the potential to direct the attention of non-specialists to China. Although *Staging the World* does not seem likely to influence current fashionings of theoretical positions by the world's intellectual vanguard, it is nonetheless a promising rehearsal of future work on a wider stage.

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Stephen Knight — *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003. Pp. xxi, 247.

I must confess to approaching this book with the suspicion that it was a simple reshuffling of materials previously published by Stephen Knight in several venues, most notably his *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994). I am pleased to say that I was not completely correct in this assumption, since there is a certain amount of new material and many new ideas; nonetheless, the debt to the 1994 book is particularly clear. Knight tries to distance