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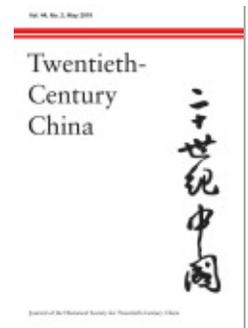
(Wusheng de yaojue: Jiang Jieshi de shicongshi yu zhanshi Zhongguo), also titled *Silent but Significant: The Role of Chiang Kai-shek's Personal Secretariat in Wartime China* by Zhang Ruide [Chang Jui-te] (review)

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Zhang Ruide [Chang Jui-te]. 無聲的要角：蔣介石的侍從室與戰時中國 (Wusheng de yaojue: Jiang Jieshi de shicongshi yu zhanshi Zhongguo), also titled *Silent but Significant: The Role of Chiang Kai-shek's Personal Secretariat in Wartime China*. Taipei: Taiwan Commercial Press, 2017. 488 pp. NT\$400 (paper).

This is a history of a small, almost entirely neglected agency that played a crucial role in China during the Second World War. Functioning as Chiang Kai-shek's confidential advisory council and presidential fixer throughout the war, this office, known as the "Personal Secretariat" (侍从室 Shicongshi), was at the center of power, secrecy, intrigues, and pivotal decisions at the very top of China's wartime high command. The author, Chang Jui-te (張瑞德 Zhang Ruide) is an accomplished, Taiwan-based historian of twentieth-century China. He states his overt impetuses for writing the book: to respond to the disappearing relevance of Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwanese political consciousness, to correct the Chinese government's decades-long campaign of demonizing the Personal Secretariat in Communist propaganda, and to fill a gap in the woefully scanty study on this vital organization.

Yet, it would be a mistake to assume that the author's motives for writing the book would cloud his judgment of Chiang or his rendition of the subject matter, for it is a remarkably balanced volume, with unvarnished fairness, candor, and critical assessment of Chiang and his wartime activities through the lenses of his confidants at the Personal Secretariat—prominently Zhang Zhizhong (張治中 1890–1969), Tang Zong (唐縱 1905–1981), and Chen Bulei (陳布雷 1890–1948).

The book traces the origin of the Personal Secretariat to 1933 in the midst of the much-glorified Nanjing Decade, a period when the newly created and stabilized Guomindang (GMD) government under Chiang Kai-shek transitioned from focusing on a military unification and pacification of China to a comprehensive state-building mission. Predominantly a military man, Chiang Kai-shek felt inadequate in designing a new state for a big country. In November 1933, a newly minted Columbia University PhD, Zhang Yiding (張彝鼎 b. 1902), whose dissertation had won him fame when it was published by Columbia University Press under the title *The Interpretation of Treaties by Judicial Tribunals*,¹ met Chiang in Nanchang at his military command stockade. Chiang was mesmerized by Zhang, who persuaded the generalissimo to set up a Mobile Headquarters Designing Council (行營设计会 Xingying shejihui) with one central mission: to draft a comprehensive blueprint for a new government with modern departments in charge of China's economy, education, law and order, infrastructure, public health, taxation, mapping, statistics, and so on. Chiang approved with alacrity. Initially, the Designing Council was staffed mainly with young and idealistic American-trained PhDs who lacked political experience. Chiang soon found their usefulness rather limited and gradually replaced them with Whampoa graduates and alumni of the GMD Army Command and Staff University. He also reduced the role and function of the Designing Council to that of an internal advisory and clerical staff division in charge of his day-to-day office needs, taking care of urgent and discrete tasks, vetting promotional credentials, and so on. The office was soon renamed "Personal

¹ Yi-Ting Chang, *The Interpretation of Treaties by Judicial Tribunals* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933).

Secretariat” and divided into several bureaus in charge of general affairs, chief of staff, presidential security, personnel and promotion, confidential secretaries, research and analysis, and intelligence.

The transformation from the Designing Council to the Personal Secretariat is not without irony: while Chiang’s original intention for setting up the organization was to build various modern institutions for the state, what he ended up having was a powerful agency, the Personal Secretariat, whose primary function was to replace the role of various institutions of the government and society, making it his personal squad of a few dozen extraordinary military men and talented civilians who were fanatically loyal to him, selfless, devoid of political ambition, and willing to carry out his every instruction by bypassing various bureaucratic and administrative procedures and institutions.

The book has 10 chapters, the bulk of which are devoted to five areas of wartime governance in which the Personal Secretariat exercised crucial influence: intelligence, politics, military affairs, foreign affairs, and propaganda. Two long chapters are also allocated to analyzing two unique systems of Chiang Kai-shek’s wartime command: the handwritten instruction system (手令制度 *shouling zhidu*) and Chiang’s special envoys (特使 *teshi*).

The archival research and use of secondary sources for this book are meticulous and thorough. Of particular significance is the author’s professional handling of politically polarizing personalities and institutions, especially analysis on Bureau Six for Intelligence under General Tang Zong, making it an impassioned account of wartime high politics and key military decisions.

The structural arrangements of the book are generally sound, but at times there are too many small subsections within a chapter that read like encyclopedia entries. The separate subsections, such as those on GMD support for the Korean independence movements and various factions in wartime Chongqing, become a distraction without sufficient analysis and further documentation.

The book’s contribution to historical epistemology is also worth notice. For decades, historians have debated the virtues and shortcoming of various types of historical inquiries. The traditional “top-down” approach, notably prominent in the old-fashioned political and diplomatic history, has been challenged by the “bottom-up” approach of newly popular social, cultural, economic, and gender histories. In the China field, the battle cries are phrased slightly differently: it’s about “Western impact” vs. “Eastern response,” which can be roughly described as “outside-in” vs. “inside-out” approaches. Chang’s new study of Chiang’s Personal Secretariat is a rare mixed breed, a “top-down history with an inside-out perspective.” It’s an apt analysis from the top of China’s wartime command headquarters with painstakingly detailed research from the innermost viewpoint of China’s wartime efforts.

Chang Jui-te’s new tome is a tour de force that breaks new ground in the fast-growing and ever-widening field of studies on wartime China. It deserves a serious and appreciative audience in the China field.

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