

War and Revolution in South China: The Story of a Transnational Biracial Family, 1936–1951. By Edward J. M. Rhoads. Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Studies Series. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2021. Pp. x + 203. \$63.00 hardcover.

The stories of civilian wartime experiences contain elements of both the universal and the particular. Edward Rhoads's new book, *War and Revolution in South China: The Story of a Transnational Biracial Family, 1936–1951*, skilfully navigates the two dimensions by taking us through these harrowing war years seen from the perspective of his own family. It is without doubt, however, that it is the particulars of this story that make the book so compelling. Between 1842 and 1936, the number of biracial and transnational families in South China and Hong Kong grew with the arrival of Westerners to the region, many of them single men. Yet, very little is known beyond Jean Gittins's memoir, *Stanley: Behind Barbed Wire*,¹ about how such families fared during the second Sino-Japanese War and World War II (1937–1945). *War and Revolution in South China* makes an important contribution in providing a vivid narrative of the lived experiences of the biracial and transnational Rhoads family during a pivotal era in modern East Asian history, one in which the US and China went from being steadfast allies to Cold War enemies. The book will appeal both to readers interested in general World War II history, and to those more specifically interested in the interracial dimension of this narrative.

Chapter 1 tells the story of the author's mother, Ngan Chi Kit 顏志潔, born in 1909 or 1910, during the final years of the Qing dynasty (1644–1912). This chapter is a fascinating portrait of a woman who broke with the convention of the time to become a professional woman, and later marry a foreigner. A native of Ngan Bin Village 顏邊村 in Guangdong province, Ngan Chi Kit was born to a wealthy merchant with a modern outlook who chose to raise his daughters in a progressive manner. Like other urban elite families in South China, they did not bind their daughters' feet, and Chi Kit was sent with two of her sisters to receive a formal education in one of Guangzhou's first middle schools for girls. After graduating from True Light Middle School (Zhengguang zhongxuexiao 真光中學校) in 1927, Chi Kit became a secretary at Lingnan University in 1933, earning a handsome wage of HK\$1,500 annually. She married Chan Cheuk Ming 陳燭明 in the mid-1930s, but was divorced soon after.

In Chapter 2, we turn to the story of the author's father, Howard Garrett Rhoads, born in 1900 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA, the son of middle-class business owners. Rhoads attended the University of Pennsylvania, where he majored

¹ Jean Gittins, *Stanley: Behind Barbed Wire* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1982).

in English and participated in the Students' Army Training Corps. Graduating from college in 1921, Howard's ambition was to become an English professor and he taught in various universities before his mother's illness forced him to return to Philadelphia. Following his mother's death in 1935, an unexpected opportunity with the Department of Western Languages and Literature at Lingnan University took him to China. Speculating on his father's unusual and rather unexpected decision to go to China (he had no missionary interests), Rhoads demonstrates how this decision would dramatically alter the course of his life—and that of Ngan Chi Kit.

Having set the stage for Chi Kit and Howard's encounter at Lingnan University, their romance and highly unconventional marriage, the author turns in the next chapters to the story of the war in South China from 1936 to 1945, with chapters 3–6 forming the heart of the narrative. We see how the Lingnan University community, initially quite distant from Japanese aggression in northern China, gradually became drawn into the war as the Japanese campaign proceeded southward, yet nonetheless did its best to maintain academic continuity through 1937 and 1938. In the midst of the turmoil of 1938, when the university was feeling the impact of both the war and internal personnel issues, our author was born, "exactly six months after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident and the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War" (p. 50). Although the author, due to his young age and the vagaries of memory, does not recall first-hand the events of the time, these chapters take us through pivotal moments such as the Japanese invasion, the evacuation of Guangzhou, the fall of Hong Kong, the US entry into the war, the Japanese internment of enemy aliens at Stanley Civilian Internment Camp in Hong Kong, the exodus into Free China, and the Japanese surrender.

These events are of course well known to readers of modern Chinese history, but we experience them in an entirely new light from the perspective of a biracial transnational family in South China and Hong Kong. Not only do we journey through this tumultuous history alongside the characters of Chi Kit and Howard, but we also see how their interracial union profoundly impacted the family's experiences. For example, following the British evacuation of women and children from Hong Kong in June 1940, the US Department of State in October 1940 "suggested" the evacuation of American women and children from South China. This posed a dilemma for the Rhoads family. The author speculates that his "father must have thought about getting his wife and child out of possible harm's way" (p. 60). However, the US Chinese Exclusion Act (1882–1943) proved an obstacle. Whereas US law endowed children born abroad to US citizen fathers US citizenship, Chi Kit, being a Chinese woman subject to the Chinese Exclusion Act, faced the near impossibility of entering the US without her American husband at the time. Hence, the family decided not to pursue that route, and instead remained in Hong Kong, where Lingnan classes had been relocated. Another dilemma arose after the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong when they interned enemy aliens beginning in 1942. As an American,

the author's father was interned by the Japanese beginning in January 1942, first at a hotel, and then at Stanley Internment Camp. Ngan Chi Kit, being Chinese, and her Eurasian son (our author) in contrast were not considered enemy aliens, and hence not subject to internment. Howard apparently had hoped for his wife and son to be able to join him at Stanley—both for the sake of family unity and to protect his wife and young child from harm at the hands of the Japanese. But, as another internee wrote in January 1942: "All Chinese and Eurasian people have been asked to leave the camp. That means that Mrs. Rhoads will not be able to join her husband as he had hoped to have her do" (p. 69). As Rhoads points out, some Chinese and Eurasians did in fact remain in the camp, as detailed in Jean Gittins's moving memoir, *Stanley: Behind Barbed Wire*. Nevertheless, Chi Kit and Edward were not among them, and lived separately in Hong Kong until the middle or end of March.

The family endured further separation when Howard was repatriated to the US in 1942. Upon landing on US soil, Howard's only thought was to return to war-torn China to reunite with his family, which he did in 1943, still under contract with Lingnan. Following a five-month journey, Howard reunited with his family and took up his new duties at the University, now relocated to the Chinese interior. Despite the difficulties, Howard found the students in good spirits, and dedicated to their studies: "Most of them have learned what it means to be a bit hungry, to be a bit dirty, to wash their own clothes and to carry their own water," he wrote in a letter. Nonetheless, despite the deprivations "far more of them are eager to read and the books we do have are in constant use" (p. 99). This idyllic interlude is soon interrupted by war. On 30 May 1944, Lingnan President Y. L. Lee 李應林 received official orders "to conduct final examinations for all our colleges as well as middle school within one week" and then "to evacuate as soon as possible" (p. 101). Howard and Chi Kit, now pregnant with a second child, were on the run again with their young son and their nanny, Ah Hoh, fleeing to Chongqing.

Chapter 6 recounts life in Chongqing with the US government in 1944 and 1945, when Howard worked for the American Office of War Information (OWI). In this chapter we learn fascinating information about the operations of the OWI in Chongqing, which was principally a propaganda agency of the US government. We also see the mixed community of Americans and Chinese living in Chongqing amid the jumble of cultures, rampant inflation, and the uncertainties of war. The light at the end of the tunnel begins to appear in May 1945, with the end of the war coming much more swiftly than anticipated. Chapter 6 ends as joyous crowds pour out onto the streets of Chongqing to celebrate the victory over Japan after eight long years.

Chapter 7 provides a picture of life "back home in Guangzhou" between 1945 and 1948. With Howard having proved himself invaluable during the war years, Lingnan University offered him a permanent appointment at last. He participated in the revival of the old campus and continued to work with the US Information

Service (USIS). Despite the end of the war, this was a time of continuing shortages and hardship, hyperinflation, and cholera. Having given birth to her second child, Chi Kit now returned to her work as a stenographer and typist, and was active in the life of the university. In this chapter, we also learn of the hardships faced by the Ngan family during the war. The author reflects here on his experiences as a biracial child growing up in China during this era. Language was one of his challenges; Cantonese was young Edward's primary language, spoken with his mother and his nanny, but he was compelled to learn Mandarin during his year in Chongqing, and further to speak English with his father. In September 1947, he was transferred from the university's Chinese primary school to the newly opened Western school, beginning at last a formal education in English. His classmates here included the Mack sisters, who, like Rhoads, were the children of an interracial marriage (in their case, an American mother who had taught at Lingnan in the 1930s and a Chinese father also on the Lingnan faculty). As Rhoads recalls: "Attitudes in China toward mixed-race children such as us were themselves mixed" (p. 139). Explaining these mixed sentiments, which included both prejudice and favourable views, Rhoads notes: "I, for one, do not recall being ostracized or stigmatized for being Eurasian. Perhaps this was because I was living in the cocoon-like environment of a university campus" (p. 140).

Enjoying a long overdue furlough, Howard returned with his family to the US in the fall of 1948, as recounted in Chapter 8. As Rhoads notes, this year spent away from China was "a particularly momentous one" (p. 142). With popular support for the Chinese Nationalist government rapidly diminishing, the Communist forces led by Mao Zedong swept into power, establishing the People's Republic of China in 1949. The revolution meant great changes at the Lingnan campus, where the role of Christianity had already been under question since the mid-1930s. Notwithstanding, Howard was once again emphatic about returning to China after his furlough, contrary to the general trend of Westerners fleeing China.

Chapter 9 narrates the Communist takeover between 1949 and 1951, when life went on "largely as before" for the students and Western personnel at Lingnan. Indeed, Rhoads writes that these years were, "in many respects, Lingnan's golden age" (p. 151), as prominent Chinese scholars fleeing the turmoil in North China were recruited to the faculty, while Western faculty continued to teach subjects such as English. Soon enough, however, it becomes apparent that Americans will need to leave China. Once again, the biracial family faces a dilemma as Chi Kit struggles to obtain her visa to enter the US on non-quota status as the wife of an American citizen. Like much of China, Lingnan campus became swept up in anti-Americanism, and Howard is soon identified as an "American reactionary professor," accused of looking down on Chinese women, beating his wife, and teaching "pornography" (p. 165). Yet once more, the family was forced to pick up roots and evacuate. Were they relieved to escape from Communist China and gain permanent entry into the US as a family at long last? Rhoads writes:

My parents never said how they felt about leaving China. I don't believe that they shared Father Hahn's apparent relief and happiness to be out of the country. For both my parents the previous fourteen years had been the most exciting and meaningful of their lives. Despite all the wartime trials and tribulations, it had been a good life for the two of them. . . . I believe that if external circumstances had allowed, they would not have left. But of course, when the time came, they had no choice but to leave. (pp. 170–71)

The Epilogue provides a brief account of the demise and revival of Lingnan University, as well as a short summary of the fate of the Rhoads family. The narrative ends with the author's homecoming to Lingnan University in January 2004, and a moving reunion with primary school classmates.

This book makes several important contributions to the field. First, the focus on South China extends our understanding of the devastating impact of the war with Japan beyond northern and central China, which to date has been the focus of most existing scholarship. Second, it bridges Chinese history and Hong Kong history with the narrative continually moving between Mainland China and the British colony, following the movements of the Rhoads family. Third, by presenting a micro-history told from the perspective of an individual family, the book provides an important counterpart to the dominant macro-histories of World War II. From the perspectives of Howard and Chi Kit, we see the details of everyday life as they brace for the onslaught of war, endure flight and separation, and enjoy brief respites of seemingly "normal" life in between their constant movement as refugees. Fourth, the book greatly advances our knowledge of the lived experiences of biracial families in China, Hong Kong, and the US during this important era of Chinese history, addressing a crucial gap in the historical literature. With a focus on the lived experiences of Howard and Chi Kit, the author not only provides a lively account of the vicissitudes of war and one family's determination to overcome them, but also gains a sense of how US and Chinese nationality laws, the US Chinese Exclusion laws, anti-miscegenation laws and Japanese military regulations profoundly shaped the experiences of this biracial family. Finally, although it is not the main focus, the book contributes to our knowledge of the Japanese internment of enemy aliens at Stanley Internment Camp, complementing other works such as Gittins's *Stanley*.

At a metalevel, the book furthermore prompts a careful consideration of vital issues in historiography. What is the relationship between macro-history and micro-history? How do regional histories relate to the grander narrative of national history? How do you write history "from the bottom up" (p. 2) in the face of a dearth of sources, a chronic problem for the historiography of modern China due to the fact that few written and archival sources have survived the near constant turmoil of war and revolution from the mid-1930s to the 1980s. As the author tells us, although he himself shared many of his parents' experiences of war and revolution in South China,

he could not serve as a reliable source for his own family history owing to his young age at the time. Memory, he shows, even during his teenage years, proved vague at best, no doubt due to the constant movement and instability of his family during those years. The author further lacked family reminiscences and oral histories and had few family papers at his disposal. Miraculously, from a handful of family documents, richly supplemented with archival research and a wide array of other sources, the author has managed to painstakingly piece together the story of his family during war and revolution, spinning a lively account that brings to life the impact of war and revolution on society in South China between 1936 and 1951. The author's strong narrative voice threads this trans-Pacific history together. The book is an invaluable contribution that will appeal to specialists and general readers alike, and is easily accessible to students at the undergraduate level. Because the book spans both China and the US, it could be readily assigned to students in both US history and Asian history classes, as well as those interested in the history of interracialism.

If one might wish for anything further from this book, it would be a closer look at the experiences of the extended Ngan family during the war, and a better understanding of how Chi Kit's marriage to an American and her employment by an American institution affected (or did not affect) their situation during the war and the revolutionary period that followed. Whereas the first chapter provides extensive context on the Ngan family and their local position, as well as interesting back story on Ngan Heung Cho's 顏向初 early travels to the US as a silk merchant, and the second chapter offers a picture of the Pennsylvania-based Rhoads family, subsequent chapters take a narrower approach to defining "family" as the nuclear family, and we virtually lose sight of the extended Ngan family until we pick up their story briefly again in Chapter 7. Further knowledge of their experiences in Japanese-occupied Guangzhou, and the dispersal of various family members to Free China, Macao, and Hong Kong would also greatly contribute to our understanding of how the war and revolution affected families in South China. That said, no single book can cover it all, and perhaps the author felt that including these strands of the family story would take him too far afield from the core narrative, which is so neatly encapsulated in the tight nine chapters. Extending to just over 180 pages, the book as it stands is an ideal length for today's busy readers. It is a testament to the author's narrative skill that *War and Revolution in South China: The Story of a Transnational Biracial Family, 1936–1951* has left this reader eager for more.

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DOI: 10.29708/JCS.CUHK.202301_(76).0014

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