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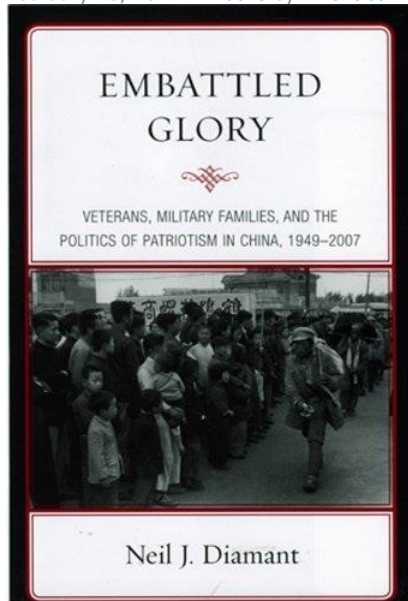
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Book Review: *Embattled Glory*

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Diamant, Neil Jeffrey. *Embattled Glory: Veterans, Military Families, and the Politics of Patriotism in China, 1949-2007*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009. xiii, 463 pp. \$34.95 (paper).

By Harold Tanner

Will virulent nationalism make China a threat to the international order? This is the question that Neil J. Diamant sets out to address in *Embattled Glory*. A number of academics as well as the mass media have argued that after 1989 the Chinese Communist Party purposely fostered a wide-spread and strongly-felt popular nationalism, and that this sense of nationalism pushes Chinese foreign policy toward more hard-line positions that could lead to diplomatic or even military conflict between China, its neighbors, and even the United States. Diamant points specifically to Peter Gries' *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics and Diplomacy* as an example of this approach. But where, asks Diamant, is the evidence for deep, broadly-held feelings of "patriotism" or "nationalism" (Diamant uses these terms interchangeably) on a truly popular level, beyond the "relatively small cohort" of extremely vocal "urban writers and elites" that Gries focuses on? (p. 19) Diamant's study of the treatment of veterans and military families from 1949 to 2007 suggests that popular nationalism is in fact very weak: that in China "nationalism and patriotism are rather cheap sentiments of the bumper sticker and American flag lapel variety, and, notwithstanding all the hoopla surrounding this topic, the world should not have to worry too much about the threat it poses to the rest of the world" (p. 415). Diamant's book, although painstakingly researched, engaging, thought-provoking and even moving, falls somewhat short of proving his point.

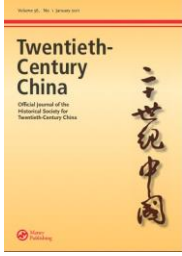
Diamant has chosen to look for evidence of nationalism in the state and society's treatment of veterans and military families. Drawing on an impressive array of archival and published sources, Diamant skillfully presents and analyzes anecdotal evidence to show us how Chinese veterans have been treated and what this tells us about China's Communist Party, its state bureaucracy, and society. Aside from the introduction and conclusion, the book includes seven chapters dealing with various aspects of the veteran and military family experience: rural veterans' quest for urban residence; the complications of veteran identity; the difficulties of finding employment; the dismal cracks and loopholes in policy and the bureaucracy; issues of health, family, and sexuality; failure on the part of the state and society to care for or even respect military families; and the problems of veterans in the reform era.

Throughout the book, Diamant convincingly makes the case that Chinese veterans have been, and continue to be, poorly treated. Most of China's veterans were from the countryside. When they were demobilized they were returned to their villages, although many (perhaps most) would have preferred to pursue higher incomes and more comfortable lives in the cities. Diamant describes both the challenges of re-integrating into rural life after military service and rural veterans' attempts to move into the cities, often in violation of Party policy and in the face of severe discrimination in regard to housing and employment. Particularly in the highly politicized 1950s through 1970s, veterans' status and identity was complicated by their expectations, habits of life and behavior learned in the military, and, for some, the contradiction between their service to the revolution and their landlord or bourgeois class background. A lack of connections (a function of having been away from home for years or of trying to make their way somewhere other than their native place), low educational levels, lack of job skills and openly expressed prejudice on the part of bureaucrats and employers often left veterans out in the cold. Policies regarding resettlement, benefits, and employment were purposely vague, which left the policy implementation to the discretion of cash-strapped, unsympathetic lower-level bureaucrats.

Diamant succeeds brilliantly in making the case that China's veterans have been shabbily treated, both by the Party, their government, and their fellow-citizens. He also draws on secondary literature and on his experience as a veteran of the Israeli army to put China's treatment of veterans into comparative perspective (in the process, places other than China come out looking pretty poorly too). But what does it all mean? What does the shameful treatment of China's veterans tell us about Chinese nationalism and whether or not it is a significant force in China's domestic politics, its foreign policy, and its management of international crisis situations?

It is here that Diamant falls somewhat short of the mark. In comparative terms, Diamant suggests that democracy and the existence of a public sphere do make some difference in the treatment of veterans: a free press and independent veterans groups can effectively draw attention to veterans' issues. In China, veterans' attempts to organize independent advocacy groups have been brutally crushed. But in the long run, Diamant sees "no direct connection between democracy and ample veterans' benefits and positive treatment" (p. 410). In Diamant's view, the key factors in making society more supportive of veterans are universal conscription and legitimate wars. China does not have universal conscription: instead, soldiers are drawn disproportionately from the rural areas. Urban elites and civilian bureaucrats do not identify with, and even look down on, rural men. Diamant also argues that although China's wars have been celebrated in propaganda, Chinese society has not accepted them as legitimate. Here, Diamant is on shaky ground. His arguments make sense, and he may in fact be correct, but the evidence is anecdotal, and readers may not be ready to follow him as he leaps from the poor treatment of veterans to the assumption that lukewarm support for China's wars and therefore a lack of patriotism is the underlying reason. Shabby treatment of veterans may just as well be caused by prejudice, selfishness, and hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy is, in fact, an issue that Diamant should take more seriously. He condemns the hypocrisy of a government that fails its veterans but excels at erecting billboards trumpeting "the people's support of the military" (p. 420). But he pays too little attention to the hypocrisy of nationalists, whether they be ordinary people or urban elites. In Diamant's eyes, it seems that hypocritical nationalism does not count: "Advocating violence with someone else's blood does not a 'nationalist' make" (p. 423). "Chicken-hawk" nationalism may indeed be shallow, and it may be expressed by a vocal, unrepresentative, hypocritical urban elite, but it can still have serious policy consequences. It is this potential that Peter Gries and a number of other scholars (including Susan Shirk) whose work Diamant does not take into account are concerned with. To argue that China's post-1989 nationalism constitutes a threat to world peace is clearly irresponsible alarmism. But to dismiss it as a possible factor in the Chinese leadership's decision-making on the grounds that China's veterans have been poorly treated is a bit of a stretch. Despite these points of disagreement, I cannot emphasize too much that *Embattled Glory* is an excellent and thought-provoking piece of scholarship which would make excellent reading for graduate and advanced undergraduate students as well as to scholars with a serious interest in the history and politics of the People's Republic.



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