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Alan Baumler, *The Chinese and Opium under the Republic: Worse than Floods and Wild Beasts*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2007, 298 pp.

Xavier Paulès



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- 1 Although the title hints at a discussion of the social impact of opium, this book is more about policies devised to control the substance. As the last in a series of studies undertaken in the United States in the 1990s focusing on the policy challenges relating to opium in the twentieth century,¹ Baumler's work is handicapped by having to cover familiar ground without offering any outstandingly original perspectives.
- 2 Baumler sets out to describe the evolution of how opium came to be perceived as a social problem and how that influenced policies towards it during China's republican era. The first three chapters treat the period before the pivotal year of 1919, when the last stocks of opium imported from India were destroyed. These initial chapters attempt no more than a synthesis of existing scholarship on the subject, and while the distilled information is unquestionably important, it hardly sheds new light. Of greater interest is Chapter 5, which analyses Kuomintang (KMT) policies in the late 1920s. This was a confusing and relatively obscure period during which the party's attempts to set up a nationwide opium monopoly to its benefit were frustrated by the complexity and magnitude of the drug trade. Raw opium was produced largely in interior provinces and transported over great distances to major centres on the coast, where a network of wholesalers, retailers, and opium dens took charge of reaching the actual consumers. But the KMT's hold on the country and society was ultimately too tenuous for it to smoothly operate such a vast trafficking machine, while at the same time facing pressures from the anti-opium lobby, most notably the National Anti-Opium

Association. Baumler also carefully sets out the less well-known role played by the KMT chapters in Zhejiang and Jiangsu (p 124-25).

- 3 The failure of these premature attempts to create a monopoly over the entire drug trade led the KMT to try for control over major opium shipments along the Yangzi, the vital artery linking the main poppy-growing provinces (Sichuan, Yunnan) to Shanghai. In May 1929, Chiang Kai-shek gained control of the strategic port of Hankou, previously in the hands of the Guangxi clique, and soon afterwards established an inspection bureau that became the centrepiece of the opium administration that took shape in the following years. Enjoying surveillance over the main opium trade route in China, Chiang was well placed to gradually extend control over poppy production as well as the various distribution networks.
- 4 It was only as part of the Six Year Plan to Eliminate Opium and Drugs announced in 1935 (covered in the book's last three chapters) that Chiang Kai-shek sought to impose a countrywide control over opium distribution. The declared aim was to proceed towards eradication of opium by gradually reducing the quantities produced and the number of people authorised to smoke it. The major initiatives were initially aimed at curtailing consumption, backed by major propaganda work, registration of smokers, and the opening of a number of clinics to cure addicts. When the Japanese invasion in 1937 caused the government to lose control of the major consumption areas along the east coast, it focused its efforts on gaining greater control of Sichuan, which was at the heart of the main poppy growing zones, and acted effectively to reduce the area under cultivation. By the end of the plan period in April 1940, the KMT was able to claim its campaign a success, an assessment that Baumler generally endorses while noting that the drug was still far from having been eradicated.
- 5 A positive aspect of the book worth mentioning is its varied regional focus. It is well known that during the so-called Nanjing Decade (which ended in 1937), many warlords pursued their own opium policies in order to maintain control of the revenues generated by the drug. Meanwhile, Baumler points out, the case of Zhejiang was particularly interesting: Far from being under the sway of a local strongman, Zhejiang was one of Chiang's best-controlled provinces, yet between 1927 and 1935, the province managed to run a quasi-independent opium regime. At the same time, Zhejiang witnessed real efforts at eradicating opium, and it was in that spirit that local authorities (backed by the Zhejiang branch of the Anti-Opium Association) defied Chiang Kai-shek. Chiang simply had to comply, despite his wish to see Zhejiang take part in the lucrative opium trade under his overall control, even though that went against the anti-drug campaign (p 146-149).
- 6 In his localised examination of the issue, Baumler has shown the direction future research should take. Monographic studies focusing on individual provinces are especially needed in order to better understand the way in which the central government's opium policies were implemented on the local level.
- 7 A final observation is that the author has been rather economical in terms of endnotes, while maps and a glossary are sorely missed. The work is also peppered with glaring proofreading errors, especially in the notes and bibliography.

NOTES

1. Joyce Madancy, *The Troublesome Legacy of Commissioner Lin, 1820s to 1920s*, Cambridge/London, Harvard University Press, 2003; Edward R. Slack Jr., *Opium, State and Society, China's Narco-Economy and the Guomindang, 1924-1937*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2001; Zhou Yongming, *Anti-Drug Crusades in Twentieth-Century China: Nationalism, History and State Building*, Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1999.