

This is the version of the article/chapter accepted for publication in *Frontiers of History in China* published by Brill in *Frontiers of History in China*, 14 (3). pp. 463-466.

Accepted version downloaded from SOAS Research Online: <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/31549>

Chang, Jui-te 張瑞德, *Wusheng de Yaojue: Jiang Jieshi de Shicong shi yu Zhanshi Zhongguo* 無聲的要角：蔣介石的侍從室與戰時中國 (Silent but Significant: the Role of Chiang Kai-shek's Personal Secretariat in Wartime China). Taipei New City: Taiwan Shangju, 2017. ISBN 978-975-04-3117-6

This monograph, weighing in a hefty 488 pages including bibliography and index of proper names, is a labor of love and a tour de force. Chang Jui-te is perhaps best known as one of the foremost military historians of Republican China. Although the key figures that populate this monograph were all military men, this is not primarily a work of military history. Chang's earlier monographs focussed on Republican era institutions, particularly railroads, but despite its ostensible subject – Chiang Kai-shek's personal secretariat – this is no mere institutional study. Instead, *Wusheng de Yaojue* goes far beyond Chang's earlier work, and by sheer force of example makes a very strong case for bringing together different kinds of history. Institutional history, military history, biographical history, intelligence history, Party history, diplomatic history, and the fraught history of modern China in Tibet are all covered. And if one widens notions of culture to include the difficult circumstances and perceptual filters under which individuals made the kinds of decisions they did, then cultural history is included as well.

The focus of this monograph is an almost unknown organization, the National Government Military Affairs Commission Head's Personal Secretariat (國民政府軍事委員會委員長侍從室), or the Personal Secretariat (侍從室) for short. The very name of the organization hints at what is to come. As part of the National Government through the Military Affairs Commission it had inherent potential for spread throughout government, military and party organizations; as an advisory organization to the Head of the Military Affairs Commission, by design it served one man and one man only – Chiang Kai-shek.

The origins of the Personal Secretariat, however, were very different. Chang lays out a vivid scene from 1933, when Chiang Kai-shek granted an audience at his Nanchang Headquarters to a newly returned student, Zhang Yiding. Zhang, had recently finished his PhD in law at Columbia University, and witnessed first-hand what he perceived as the efficiency and industriousness of Western Europe and the chaos, waste and laziness of Africa and the Middle East on his travels back to China proposed that Chiang create a "Camp Planning Committee" (行營設計會) in order to "improve all provincial party, government, and military organizations – and to restore construction work in areas recovered from communist at the earliest opportunity" [P. 11]. Chiang Kai-shek agreed readily, and a new unit was established with a brief that included advising on every possible organizational and institutional reform to bring greater efficiency and coordination to a still weak National Government. Originally staffed by a handful of young, idealistic, and often foreign trained recent graduates, the Camp Planning Committee was never able to transcend the military organization that housed it. The highly educated initial staff was eased out by a small cadre of military men, most of whom were of unimpeachable loyalty to Chiang Kai-shek from Whampoa days, and the focus of the new organization, now renamed the

Personal Secretariat, shifted away from reforming the government and provinces to be more modern and efficient, and towards managing paper flows from multiple security, military and foreign affairs organizations, advising on general policy directions, and, insofar as it was able to, implementing the wishes of Chiang Kai-shek.

*Wusheng de Yaojue* contains a wealth of carefully sourced information and balanced analysis. Chang's research on the Personal Secretariat's activities is nothing short of magisterial. In this volume there is something for every scholar of Republican era political or institutional history to like. After the first two chapters, which concentrate on antecedents to the Personal Secretariat and its organization and key personnel, further lengthy chapters are devoted to such important topics as intelligence (Chapter Three), party and government (Chapter Four), the military (Chapter Five), diplomacy (Chapter Six), propaganda (Chapter Seven), and relatively shorter concluding chapters on a new system of Chiang's personally handwritten orders (Chapter Eight), and efforts to advance China's claims on the southwestern border between Tibet and India. Most scholars would be satisfied with a monograph on one, or at most two, of these topics, but Chang considers each as fully as the sources allow.

In addition to the sheer span of sub-topics so ably researched, Chang does something that very few scholars are able to do with political and administrative history: he makes it interesting and enjoyable to read. His sources are astonishingly comprehensive. They draw from private diaries, archives from Chongqing to Nanjing to Taipei, memoirs, and a truly incredible range of secondary sources in Chinese and English. Many historians are as conscientious, but Chang's real gift is his ability to weave together the macro and the micro in an utterly compelling way. Through reflections captured in the diaries of key individuals and subordinates, the reader is really given a sense of the Personal Secretariat's organizational culture of self-effacing loyalty and caution, as well as the personalities and struggles endured by its key personalities – particularly Chen Bulei, who oversaw the Secretariat and Tang Zong, who was the head of Secretariat's Sixth Section in charge of intelligence. One sees the forms that tabulate the blizzard of paper coming in to the relatively small and undermanned Personal Secretariat – paper that had to be organized, sorted by level of importance, digested, and when necessary, passed on to Chiang Kai-shek. Chang builds from the small vignette to the medium level analysis that lays out such important topics as the competition between the Guomindang Party Central Executive Committee Investigation and Statistics Bureau (中統), dominated by the Chen Brothers and the National Government Military Affairs Committee Investigation and Statistics Bureau (軍統) headed by the fearsome Dai Li and Mao Renfeng, (The monograph is more than worth acquiring solely for the chapter that details the domestic strife between different intelligence units, and the Personal Secretariat's efforts to coordinate and dampen down those tensions). Also detailed are the Personal Secretariat's mostly vain efforts to reinvigorate and establish control over Party organization and its only partial success in asserting control over military appointments. The Personal Secretariat was also only partially successful in implementing Chiang Kai-shek's wishes in the realm of diplomacy, which often involved bypassing the regular diplomats in favour of direct summits, and worryingly frequently engaging in secret diplomacy and deals about which the regular diplomatic establishment had no knowledge. Each chapter is brought to a thoughtful conclusion with a general evaluation of what the Secretariat was and was not able to accomplish.

It is at this final level of macro analysis that the monograph's real substance becomes clear. An extended research project that is ostensibly on a little-known advisory organization at the highest levels of decision making political and military power in the 1930s and 1940s in microcosm reflects the Nationalist Party-military-government's efforts to quickly form an effective and

responsive government under enormous resource constraints. The Personal Secretariat quickly morphed into a synecdoche for Chiang Kai-shek's state building efforts as a whole: cautious, stressing loyalty above all, and utterly outmatched by the circumstances in which the attempt was made to bring bring order, coordination, and reinvigoration to China as a whole. This is a volume that is sure to be consulted widely by scholars of Republican China. Chang Jui-de is to be congratulated for bringing out such detailed and superb scholarship for us all.

Julia C. Strauss

SOAS (School of Oriental and  
African Studies)

e-mail: [js11@soas.ac.uk](mailto:js11@soas.ac.uk)