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Neil J. Diamant, *Embattled Glory: Veterans, Military Families, and the Politics of Patriotism in China, 1949–2007*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009. Pp. xiii, 463. ISBN 978-0-7425-5766-6.

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Several recent books have focused on modern China's military, but none (and few articles) deal with demobilized military personnel, their resettlement, employment, and care, or financial and other support for the families of serving and retired servicemen, and the widows, children, and other dependents of those who died on active duty. These seldom examined topics are the subject of *Embattled Glory*. Neil Diamant is associate professor of Asian law and society at Dickinson College and the author of books and articles on the family, society, and law in contemporary China.¹ He was educated in both Israel and the United States, and has served in the Israeli army, to which he compares China's military system.

The research for this book involved several trips to China, where Diamant consulted the Municipal archives of Shanghai, Beijing, and their outlying municipalities, and the Shandong Provincial Archives. He had access to government archives on Taiwan but makes few comparisons between the two Chinas on the handling of veteran affairs. He does not cite archives of China's Ministry of Defense or other national-level government bureaus. Most of his materials date between 1949 and the early 1960s. This reliance on primary sources of limited and atypical regions raises a serious question that cannot be answered without access to more archival materials: specifically, was the treatment of veterans and their families in China's capital city Beijing and premier port Shanghai plus one province representative of the whole nation?

The book has eight chapters, plus a short concluding chapter that discusses wounded soldiers from the current Iraq war and other issues confronting the United States as a result of the war. Three appendices comprise a brief survey of archival materials in China that the author used, a list of Chinese characters, and a survey of archival and published sources. Each chapter has several subsections followed by lengthy endnotes totaling sixty-seven pages for the whole book.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) was established on 1 October 1949. Although multiple factors caused the collapse of the Nationalist government, which retreated to Taiwan, military victories by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in the civil war were decisive. One year later, the elements of the PLA (disguised as volunteers) intervened to save China's ally, the communist regime in North Korea, from collapse in its war against U.S.-led United Nations forces. The ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) capitalized on these two significant events to boost the people's nationalistic pride and patriotism. Under the circumstances, one would assume strong party, government, and popular support for the military, including veterans and their families.

Diamant's research shows the precise opposite. His book documents the discrimination against and the humiliations and victimization of veterans and their families. For comparison, he discusses at length how other states treated their soldiers and veterans, including ancient Rome, the United States from the War of Independence to the present, Great Britain, France, and Germany after World Wars I and II, the Soviet Union, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, several former British colonies in Africa, and his own country, Israel. Although comparisons with modern British, French, U.S., and Soviet policies and attitudes are relevant, the inclusion of many small countries and ancient Rome is perplexing, distracting, and to little purpose. Even more remarkably, Diamant never mentions several Chinese dynasties that enjoyed great military success and supported large armies, most notably the Han (contemporary with the late Roman Republic and early

1. See *Revolutionizing the Family: Politics, Love, and Divorce in Urban and Rural China, 1949–1968* (Berkeley: U Calif Pr, 2000), *Engaging the Law in China: State, Society, and Possibilities for Justice* [ed. with S.B. Lubman and K.J. O'Brien] (Stanford: Stanford U Pr, 2005), and "Re-Examining the Impact of the 1950 Marriage Law: State Improvisation, Local Initiative and Rural Family Change," *China Quarterly* 161 (2001) 171–98.

Empire). Further, he incorrectly states of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) that its elite banner army soldiers “were banned from other occupations such as trade and had to work the land even though they were not inclined to farm” (61). In fact, the banner units of hereditary soldiers were granted land worked by tenant farmers whose rent payments supported them and their families throughout their lives.

Diamant sees several reasons for the disrespect, neglect, and discrimination against the PLA veterans, their families and those of “martyrs” (men who died in active service). One is the long (twenty-six-year) duration of the wars that culminated in the establishment of the PRC. Many groups besides the army contributed to the victory and wanted a piece of the pie. Thus “glory was sliced and diced into millions of little pieces and distributed widely, leaving many veterans vulnerable to political attacks against their status” (16). Diamant cites a relevant comparison with other modern nations: whereas Britain, Germany, and the United States enacted universal military service laws during the world wars, China did so neither before nor after 1949. Thus veterans in Western countries came from a cross section of society, which allowed them access to power and respect after the wars, even in defeated Germany. By contrast, China’s army both before and after 1949 relied on poorly educated rural recruits, some of whom enlisted out of desperation. Most hoped for “urban status” after demobilization because cities offered better living conditions and job opportunities. These men found their aspirations blocked by urbanites who despised them and rejected their claims for good treatment for having fought in the civil war and against the United States in Korea, especially since many educated city dwellers disliked communism and admired the United States. Additionally, most of the party cadres who ruled the cities and allocated jobs were urbanites and non-veterans and therefore unsympathetic to veterans’ claims. Diamant also points out that, unlike the situation in modern Western countries, Chinese culture and its elites did not associate military service with “positive masculine values.” Finally, the government had other, higher domestic priorities: land reform, followed by collectivization.

After its military successes, China needed to reduce the size of the PLA. Between 1950 and 1957, 5.26 million soldiers were discharged, often in a chaotic manner. Some units were disbanded in their original home regions, others were sent to the northwest to pioneer as military colonists (previous dynasties had used veterans in this same manner), still other soldiers were left randomly where their units demobilized, sometimes far from their homes. Unlike many other countries, China had no office specifically charged with demobilization and veteran’s affairs. The task was dumped on the Bureau of Civil Affairs, a low prestige office that also handled welfare cases. This bureau was inefficient and riddled with corruption. Its officers suffered from low morale, and many sought transfers to other offices. No wonder the bureau was unwilling and unable to cope with the massive problems connected with demobilization.

Several major issues confronted veterans on returning to their home villages. Some had no families or houses left, others arrived after their village land had already been redistributed and found no provisions had been made for them, still others were disabled or had lost their farming skills and therefore could not earn enough work points to survive. The cadres in charge were unsympathetic; some had even taken advantage of or abused the soldiers’ womenfolk while they were away on duty. Many veterans felt their service entitled them to go to cities rather than their original country homes to find work because city wages and living standards were higher. Some even managed to get to Shanghai and Beijing. If the information from records of Shanghai, Beijing, and nearby municipalities holds true for other urban areas, veterans were badly treated by their urban compatriots, who often called them “trash” because they believed that soldiers must have committed offenses to be discharged. Like their colleagues in the countryside, urban cadres of the Bureau of Civil Affairs treated veterans as nuisances and troublemakers and ignored or fudged orders from Beijing to help them find suitable jobs and housing. Likewise, managers of state-owned enterprises either refused to hire veterans or hired them only at the lowest grade levels or as temporary workers. All veterans suffered indifference and indignities from the general population and many had to beg to exist. Letters of complaint to higher authorities were usually lost in the bureaucratic tangle or simply ignored.

A single high-ranking official exposed injustices to veterans—Minister of Defense Marshal Peng Dehuai—but he fell from power in 1959. While veterans in many countries formed organizations to further

their goals, Chinese veterans were thwarted and punished each time they tried, beginning in 1957 when the government declared a newly formed Chinese Veterans Association “reactionary” and “rightist” and forcibly disbanded it with troops. Whereas Mao Zedong reviewed huge numbers of young Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution, only Premier Zhou Enlai received a delegation of veterans who had traveled to Beijing in December 1966, and then only to inform them that they could not form their own organization. In 1966 and 1967, the PLA was ordered to suppress veterans organizations wherever they existed. This included veterans in southern provinces bordering northern Vietnam who had served in the conflict between China and Vietnam in 1979 and demonstrated for rights after the war. Nonetheless, sporadic veterans’ protests continued; most embarrassing for the government was the one held in Yan’an, symbolically significant to the CCP as their capital between 1936 and 1949. To this day, veterans organizations are still prohibited in China.

Reforms begun by Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s posed twin problems for veterans. One was the downsizing of the PLA in favor of a mechanized modern army: between 500,000 and 600,000 men were demobilized annually during the 1990s. The other was the closing of inefficient state-owned industries that had employed veterans in favor of private enterprises; many veterans were laid off as a result. A paradoxical picture has emerged as China enters the twenty-first century: its government has successfully implemented many reforms, for example, in public health, life-expectancy, and the position of women, but not, puzzlingly, in committing resources to improving the lot of veterans and their families. As Diamant observes,

In the absence of meaningful political change or policy innovation protests have persisted into 2006 and 2007. According to the Demobilized Military Cadre Resettlement Office, 70–80 percent of China’s large-scale protests were led by veterans. This number appears to be confirmed by General Guo Boxiong, a vice chairman of the Central Military Commission, who noted in a speech that many veterans were filing petitions in Beijing and whose protests were occurring in most every part of the country. In Hainan and Hunan provinces, veteran-led demonstrations almost developed into revolts...

What the PRC government seems not to understand, or perhaps understands quite well but deliberately ignores, is that veterans were protesting not only over money and conditions but also for respectful treatment from state officials and their fellow citizens—a recognition of their claim to martial citizenship and patriotic status....This could come only through a broader consensus about the role of the veterans in the revolution and the state, the legitimacy of the CCP’s wars, the meaning of the revolution, and the core identity of the nation and state, and these are still sorely lacking in the PRC (394–95).

The first seven chapters of *Embattled Glory* are organized by topic rather than chronologically, which occasions much repetition because many problems involve several issues. And, too, an over-abundance of very short quotations distracts the reader and yields a huge number of footnotes. But most troubling and mystifying to this reviewer is the author’s heavy use of comparisons between the PRC and ancient Rome and numerous modern countries great and small to the near exclusion of more apt ones between the PRC and the Nationalist government on Taiwan regarding the challenges of veteran issues. After all the two governments across the Taiwan Strait share much more in terms of history, culture, and traditions than the PRC does with Australia, Kenya, or even South Korea. Despite these shortcomings, the book makes a valuable contribution to the study of issues confronting contemporary China by concentrating on a sorely neglected subject.