

Year Zero: A History of 1945

By Ian BURUMA

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Reviewed by Chad B. DENTON

Yonsei University, Seoul, Korea (Republic of)

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Memories of the Second World War still crucially shape our world today, influencing everything from relations between states to contemporary understandings of human nature. Yet, as readers of this journal well know, the historiography and memory of the Second World War is still—70 years on—sharply divided along national lines. Despite a world-wide obsession with the war (the international library catalog WorldCat lists 282,650 titles in over 100 languages under the subject heading, “World War, 1939-1945”), relatively few studies treat this war as a global conflict.

In *Year Zero: A History of 1945*, Ian Buruma takes on this challenge and succeeds admirably. This is not unfamiliar ground for Buruma. In many ways, this book could be seen as a prequel to *The Wages of Guilt* (New York: Meridian, 1995), his study of postwar memory in Germany and Japan. Though Buruma begins and ends *Year Zero* in Europe, he avoids the trap of viewing events primarily through a European lens. His ability to speak six languages significantly aids him in this task. Buruma devotes the most pages to Japan and Germany, with significant attention given to the Soviet Union, France, and Britain (including their empires), as well as China and Poland. Buruma relies on a broad range of printed primary and secondary sources in English, French, German, Dutch and Japanese. Surprisingly, though Buruma makes liberal use of newspapers such as the *Times* of London and the American army weekly *Yank*, he does not make use of Japanese newspapers of the time, like the *Asahi Shimbun*.

The heavy archival lifting is done by the historians whose work Buruma synthesizes, such as John Dower, Ronald Spector, and Ben Shephard.

Born in the Netherlands in 1951 to a British mother and a Dutch father, Buruma opens *Year Zero* with his father's homecoming from war in the summer of 1945. Buruma's father had worked as a forced laborer in Nazi Germany and had suffered greatly, but when he returned home to his village of Nijmegen, one of the first things he did was to rejoin his university student fraternity and willingly subject himself to humiliating initiation rituals. When Buruma asked his father why he did this, his father replied that "it seemed normal," that it was "the way things were done" (p. 7). Buruma argues that this sentiment, the desire to return to "normalcy," was a shared experience of those who "emerge[d] from the wreckage" in the months immediately following the defeat of Nazi Germany and Japan. *Year Zero* shows how these individuals attempted to "build something first class and modern" (p. 73) from a shattered world. Even if many of those attempts were "destined to end in a junkyard of shattered illusions," (p. 270) Buruma nevertheless aims to "pay tribute" to these "hopes and aspirations" that shaped the postwar world.

Buruma tells this story thematically, rather than chronologically or geographically. The 368 page book is divided into three parts of roughly equal length that look at the chaotic state of societies in the war's immediate aftermath ("Liberation Complex"), the process of rebuilding those societies and restoring political legitimacy ("Clearing the Rubble"), and the attempt to create a new moral and political world order ("Never Again"). Though Buruma writes for a general audience and uses no archival sources, this book is not without an argument. In each chapter, Buruma insists on the primacy of politics, in particular, how politics both shaped and responded to the chaos of 1945. The "rapturous receptions" accorded to the American GIs by French, Dutch, Belgian, Italian, German and Japanese women provoked a "puritanical reaction," but it was a moment when "women . . . were doing as they liked" (p. 49). And out of the postwar chaos many of these women gained the right to vote.

Fear of communism mobilized the Allies to feed the starving populations of Europe and Asia, even when it meant cutting the rations of British civilians. The shared experience of hunger was profoundly socially leveling and contributed to the success of social democracy and the origins of the welfare state. Acts of mass vengeance found political support nearly everywhere, except by the Zionist leadership, who eschewed Jewish revenge for “a different kind of normality, of heroic Israelis . . . fighting their enemies as proud citizen-soldiers, far from the war-bloodied lands of Europe” (p. 101). People’s courts and trials—such as those in Manila, Belsen and Nuremberg—were flawed, but bolstered the political legitimacy of postwar governments and “spiked the guns of vengeance” (p. 233). After the war, what led to the creation of international institutions “was not so much religion or moral ideas, as politics” (p. 314). He concludes that the United Nations was weak because of the inability of the Big Powers to forge an effective alliance and to arrive at a “worldwide consensus on moral judgment” (p. 329).

Reorienting the Manchus: A Study of Sinicization, 1583–1795

By Pei HUANG

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Reviewed by Hang LIN

University of Hamburg, Germany

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The fifteen years after the antiphonal statements of Evelyn S. Rawski (“Presidential Address: Reenvisioning the Qing: The Significance of the Qing Period in Chinese History,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 55, no. 4 [1996]: 829–50) and Ping-ti Ho (“In