

Chua, Amy. 2007. *Day of Empire: How Hyperpowers Rise to Global Dominance--and Why They Fall* (New York: Doubleday), Hardcover, \$27.95

Chua's *Day of Empire* champions the connection between multicultural toleration and superpower success. Where xenophobia rears its head, notes Chua, imperial expansion grinds to a halt. When rulers attempt to create homogeneity and stamp out multiculturalism, imperial power declines. A grand, Toynbee-esque narrative synthesis, her historical sociology whisks us on a concise tour through many of the world's greatest empires, finding toleration to be a universal ingredient for success. This is an immense terrain, swiftly traversed. Beginning in ancient Persia in the sixth century B.C., Chua's journey takes us through the great land empires of Alexandrian Greece, ancient Rome, Tang China, the Mongols, Mings, Mughals and Ottomans, as well as the maritime empires of the Spanish, Dutch and British. The terminus of this voyage is, of course, Chua's own country, America, which she views as an imperial power that can learn from its predecessors.

Throughout the odyssey, Chua traces a consistent theme: toleration of cultural diversity breeds success while xenophobia prompts imperial decline. At any given moment in history, she argues, human capital resides in a diverse array of peoples. The winning power, in order to outpace its rivals, must attract the best and brightest into itself without regard to religion or ethnic origin. The ancient Persians, for example, tolerated Jewish, Egyptian and other local deities, winning over annexed populations and smoothing their path to imperial aggrandisement. Xerxes ended the glory of Persia by imposing Persian gods and customs on his subjects, stoking rebellions and paving the

way for Alexander, who won popularity among newly conquered peoples like the Egyptians by espousing toleration.

Alexander urged his Greek and Macedonian officers to take Persian brides to cement imperial unity and his syncretistic Hellenic culture proved attractive to many foreigners. Furthermore, his cavalry contained 'Bactrians, Sogdians, Arachotians, Zarangians, Areians, and Parthians' and his toleration allowed him to draw upon the specialised skill sets of all without regard to ethnic origin. Lacking indigenous naval skills, Alexander turned to seafaring peoples like the Phoenicians, Persians and Cypriots to staff and command his ships. In Rome, citizenship, law and Latin replaced Hellenism as the currency which attracted outsiders into the fold. This diversity reached right up into the highest echelons of power. Hadrian hailed from Spain, for example, while other emperors were from Gaul, Syria, North Africa and Andalusia. 'People of all colors, backgrounds and cultural traditions' mingled in Rome, remarks Chua. This coincided with the zenith of Roman dynamism, as products from every corner of the known world poured in to the capital while Roman law, technology and culture flourished and radiated outward along Roman roads.

Further East, the Chinese ruler Taizong welcomed foreigners and faiths as diverse as Buddhism, Manichaenism, Judaism, Islam and Christianity. This tolerance was rewarded by a cultural renaissance of high art and learning. Genghis Khan's Mongols furnish a similar case of a hyperpower which harnessed the multifaceted but complementary talents of diverse pools of manpower to defeat its rivals. Genghis' empire expanded east to become the largest the world had ever seen. Its freewheeling multicultural success contrasted sharply with the sectarianism and xenophobia prevailing

in Europe during this period. 'As European princes were torturing and expelling their most skilled non-Christian subjects', admonishes Chua, 'the Mongols recruited freely...blind to ethnicity and religion.' The Mongol court at Karakorum even hosted inter-faith debates where the participants were encouraged to seek common ground, lubricated by generous amounts of alcohol.

Ottoman and Dutch tolerance are well-known, and Chua cites both cases to show that empires without ethnic or religious hangups can more efficiently utilise the talents of the people they attract as immigrants and defuse the rebelliousness of those they conquer. Jews in particular served as key economic, and hence strategic, assets in both societies. I was curious as to how Chua would weave the British into her story. Rather than a global melting pot, Chua fingers the fusion of Scots, Welsh and English into one Union as the multi-ethnic launchpad for British greatness. Huguenots and, later, Jews would lend their talents to the mix. Overseas, the indirect, *laissez-faire*, tolerant style of British rule in India helped smooth the way for imperial expansion, commerce and military greatness.

We all know that the history of empire is one of rise and fall. And just as toleration facilitates the effective deployment of diverse human resources propelling empires upward, Chua opines that intolerance brings them crashing back to earth. From Xerxes' Persia to the Spanish Inquisition, the unraveling of multicultural toleration led to rebellion, economic decay and territorial dismemberment. Persecution of minority religions and customs sparks revolt, and expulsion of trading minorities like the Jews weakens the economic basis of empire. In Asia, Tang China succumbed to xenophobia and insularity while in Mughal India, the Islamic orthodoxy of Jahan and Aurangzeb replaced the heterodox tolerance of Akbar, repelling the skilled foreigners needed by the

empire and weakening support among its subjects. As for the British, Chua claims that Britain's failure to extend tolerance in the form of dominion status to its non-Protestant and non-white colonies prevented the emergence of a racially integrated union many times more powerful than the original compact between the English, Scots and Welsh.

Like Toynbee, Chua is cognizant of the need for some kind of social cohesion to offset the risk of fragmentation posed by unfettered liberty. Ancient Persia and the Mongol empire were especially guilty of lacking the necessary 'glue' to persist after their initial rise to glory. Chua's preferred form of cohesion is a loose ideology like Hellenism or Roman citizenship, which can attract outsiders without asking them to shed their private identities. Her story ends, predictably, with a number of reflections on the United States and its rivals. She evaluates the imperial prospects of China, India and the European Union, but all are found wanting when it comes to their capacity for strategic tolerance. She concludes by endorsing an America open to immigration and globalization. The relatives of American immigrants and the overseas employees of American corporations will ensure global goodwill toward the hegemon. Up to this point, Chua's version of history could have been scripted by a neoconservative, but she is careful to distance herself from the Iraq débâcle, urging the US to stick to soft power and multilateralism. Though the United States can remain pre-eminent for some time, it should eschew the path of empire to become a hyperpower 'of opportunity, dynamism, and moral force'.

Chua's book is elegantly written, rich in detail, and gathers the fragments of many literatures together to present a parsimonious thesis. Scholars will rightly be outraged by an account which ignores the vast number of competing explanations for the vicissitudes

of empire. Nothing here about the advantages of geopolitical location, indigenous technology, the separation of religion and state, the bourgeoisie, bureaucracy or law. Most damning is the failure to address the conventional view that all empires were multicultural; that nation-states superseded empires precisely because they were homogeneous and could draw upon indigenous soldiers rather than expensive, dangerous and fickle foreign mercenaries; and that a divided western Europe of competing states spurred the technical innovations which launched Atlantic Europe's supremacy. Successful empires were more multi-cultural because they were more successful and hence more attractive to outsiders. Chua's account puts the cart before the horse. While openness to new ideas is crucial and small classes of skilled foreigners like the Jews or Huguenots clearly benefited their host societies, Chua is guilty of greatly overstating the place of toleration within the complex chain of causation that drives the rise and fall of civilizations. She is on stronger territory when arguing the case for the negative effects of intolerance. These flaws aside, Chua's is an entertaining, well-researched book that presses together many arguments to make the case for a link between tolerance and imperial success. As such, it has a place on the bookshelf of scholars and students of nationalism theory.

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