China’s role in the First World War has been a curiously neglected topic. This book is the first full-length study of China’s involvement in the conflict from perspectives of international history, using largely unknown archival materials from China, France, Germany, the UK, and the USA. It explains why China wanted to join the war and what were its contributions to the war effort and the emerging world order in the postwar period. The book also demonstrates that China’s participation in the First World War was not only a defining moment in modern Chinese and world history, but also the beginning of China’s long journey toward internationalization.

In this groundbreaking and provocative book, Professor Xu adds a new dimension to our collective memory of the war, its tragedy and its significance, and restores the China war memory to its rightful place.

XU GUOQI is Wen Chao Chen Chair of History at Kalamazoo College. He is a leading scholar in the field of the international history of China, and is currently working on a study of sports and China’s internationalization, 1896–2001. He has taught history in both China and the United States.
In recent years the field of modern history has been enriched by the exploration of two parallel histories. These are the social and cultural history of armed conflict, and the impact of military events on social and cultural history.

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China and the Great War

*China’s pursuit of a new national identity and internationalization*

Xu Guoqi
To my parents
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Liang Shiyi. From Liang Tan Yuying ju shi suo cang shu han tu zhao ying cun, 1986. Courtesy of Asia Library, University of Michigan

Handwritten note of Liang Shiyi. From Liang Tan Yuying ju shi suo cang shu han tu zhao ying cun, 1986. Courtesy of Asia Library, University of Michigan

Liang Qichao. From Liang Tan Yuying ju shi suo cang shu han tu zhao ying cun, 1986. Courtesy of Asia Library, University of Michigan


Wellington Koo. From Liang Tan Yuying ju shi suo cang shu han tu zhao ying cun, 1986. Courtesy of Asia Library, University of Michigan
My interest in the topic of China and the Great War started in the late 1980s when I was working with others on a book about the history of American foreign relations. I was intrigued by the sea changes in Chinese perceptions of Woodrow Wilson during the short period of the First World War. In the early 1990s when I came to Harvard University to pursue my doctoral degree, I decided to write a dissertation on the topic that had become my intellectual obsession by then. I was extremely fortunate to have Professor Akira Iriye as my academic advisor; he has provided generous and unflagging support and encouragement through the years. I am also profoundly grateful to two other members of my dissertation committee, William C. Kirby and Ernest R. May. Like Iriye, they have shared their boundless knowledge and penetrating insights whenever I needed them and have provided much expert guidance and encouragement, as well as the example of their outstanding scholarship. Without these three mentors, this book would not have taken the shape it has.

I am indebted to many institutions for making this study possible. Harvard-Yenching Institute provided me with extremely generous funding for my graduate studies, and a grant from the Krupp Foundation greatly facilitated my over-six-month research stint in Germany. A research fellowship from Harvard University’s Center for European Studies enabled me to stay in Paris and London for half a year to visit many different archives. The Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History at Harvard generously provided summer research funds that enabled me to use the National Archives in Washington, DC. A research grant from Harvard’s Department of History helped me travel to Nanjing and spend a productive summer in the Second National Historical Archives of China. The Weatherhead Center for International affairs at Harvard appointed me a graduate fellow for several years, with an office where I shared, tested, and discussed my ideas with experts from different disciplines. The University of Toronto and York University Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Studies and the Center for Chinese Studies at the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor) both have provided accommodation as well
xii Acknowledgments

as stimulating, vibrant, and nurturing academic settings when I worked on this study in different stages. My deep gratitude to Ernest P. Young, Martin Powers, Paul M. Evans, and B. Michael Frolic, all four of them directors of the above-mentioned centers, for their kindness in hosting me at their great institutions. A debt of gratitude also goes to Kalamazoo College, which has kindly provided me with generous financial support and granted me academic leave to work on this book.

Many people have helped me in this study. I am particularly indebted to the following individuals: to Yang Shengmao, professor at Nankai University and my lifetime mentor, for his efforts and determination to train me to be a fine historian; to Chen Sanjing and Zhang Li, both at the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taipei, who went out of their way to make sure my stay at the institute's Archives was a pleasant experience; and to Calvin Hsu of the Asia Library at the University of Michigan, who has always been helpful whenever I need materials and other support. I also benefited from audience comments following my talks at Harvard University, Stanford University, and the University of Michigan, among others, and from the suggestions and criticisms from the audience and discussants in several conferences where I have presented my work. I would like to express my thanks in particular to the following people as well: to Yeh Wen-hsin for her suggestions and comments when both of us attended a Berlin conference on China's internationalization, to David Strauss and the anonymous reviewers who provided valuable advice on where and how to strengthen the text. I also owe thanks and a deep debt of gratitude to Professor Jay Winter for his confidence in this study and for his support to include this book in his series at Cambridge University Press, and to Elizabeth Howard, a dream editor any author would like to have, whose encouragement and suggestions have improved this work in production. I also would like to express my profound debt of gratitude to Terre Fisher, who has read many different drafts of the book and made comments, corrections, and suggestions that have improved it in both style and content. Without her sharp eyes and superb editing skills, the shape of the final text would have suffered. Thanks also to William Laurent, who has kindly offered his editorial expertise, and to Isabelle Dambricourt of Cambridge University Press, for her help in selecting a picture for the cover and for her thoroughness and speed.

Finally, I want to thank my family. My parents, although they were never able to go to school, understand the importance of what I am doing and have never complained as their elder son has traveled around the world to do research, but rarely has had time to write or visit them. To my wife, Ann, language cannot express properly my appreciation for all the years of love, encouragement, support, and sacrifice. Without her,
Acknowledgments

this work would never have been completed. My children, Margaret, Julia, and Tom, each used his or her own way to sustain me throughout the long and sometimes frustrating process of book writing and provided much-needed inspiration. The patience, understanding, and much comic relief they have provided helped to bring this work to a timely completion. All the above-mentioned institutions and individuals have legitimate claims to any credit this book may win; I am, of course, solely responsible for its shortcomings.
Note on romanization

This book employs the pinyin system for the transliteration of Chinese names with the exceptions of names such as Confucius, Wellington Koo, Sun Yat-sen that are familiar in the West with their established spellings. In citing Western-language sources that use the older different spelling systems, however, references to persons and places have been left unchanged.