The German Minority in Interwar Poland

The German Minority in Interwar Poland analyzes what happened when Germans from three different empires – the Russian, Habsburg, and German – were forced to live together in one new state. After the First World War, German national activists made regional distinctions among these Germans and German-speakers in Poland, with preference initially for those who had once lived in the German Empire. Rather than becoming more cohesive over time, Poland’s ethnic Germans remained divided and did not unite within a single representative organization. Polish repressive policies and unequal subsidies from the German state exacerbated these differences, while National Socialism created new hierarchies and unleashed bitter intra-ethnic conflict among German minority leaders. Winson Chu challenges prevailing interpretations that German nationalism in the twentieth century viewed “Germans” as a single homogeneous group of people. His revealing study shows that nationalist agitation could divide as well as unite an embattled ethnicity.

Winson Chu is an assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He has received awards and fellowships from the American Council of Learned Societies; the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; the German Historical Institute in Warsaw; the Friends of the German Historical Institute in Washington, D.C.; and the American Council on Germany.
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Note on Translations, Place Names, and Concepts

All translations of Polish and German sources (primary and secondary) are mine, unless indicated otherwise. As in many histories of Central Europe, place names have different spellings, and the choice of language often appears serendipitous. In this book, English place names will be used whenever possible, for example Warsaw, Cracow, but also the regions of Pomerelia, Poznania, Volhynia, and Teschen Silesia. For certain cities in interwar Poland that do not have a commonly used English equivalent, the Polish name will be used across time and regimes for consistency. For example, local Germans and Reich Germans before the war often wrote the name of Łódź simply as Lodz (but pronounced it as “Lodsch”). After the conquest of Poland in September 1939 but before the renaming to Litzmannstadt in April 1940, German occupation authorities spelled out the city’s name as Lodsch. After the war, the German spelling went back to Lodz. To keep in line with Polish sources from the main period of this study, however, this book uses Łódź (as well as Poznań, Bydgoszcz, Cieszyn) whenever there is a general reference to the city. In the names of organizations, publication information, and quotations from German and English, the spellings as they appear in the source text, such as “Lodz,” “Lodsch,” or “Litzmannstadt” will be kept. Moreover, I will also use the German forms “Lodzer,” “Posener,” “Bielitzer,” and so forth when it appears in the original German or when the emphasis on Germanness and place is important.

Among the trickiest concepts are collective terms for religious, national, or ethnic affiliations. German, Poles, and Jews often appear in the sources as ascribed categories, but these labels fail to convey multiple or countervailing affiliations. Although this book will use these terms conventionally to group very disparate peoples, it will also clarify these when necessary. Finally, usage of the term Volk, and especially in associated terms such as Volksdeutsche (ethnic German) or völkisch, should be understood only in the context of ethno-national claims and not the essential nature of groups or individuals.
Abbreviations and Acronyms

BBWR  Bezpartyjny Blok Współpracy z Rządem (Nonpartisan Bloc of Cooperation with the Government)

BDP  Bund der Deutschen Polens (also Bund der Deutschen in Polen; League of the Germans in Poland, 1920–1924)

BDP  Bürgerliche Deutsche Partei (Civic German Party, mid-1920s)

BDP  Bund der Deutschen in Polen (League of the Germans in Poland, proposed 1938–1939, never founded)

BdV  Bund der Vertriebenen (League of Expellees)

DAI  Deutsches Ausland-Institut (German Foreign Institute)

DAP  Deutsche Arbeitspartei Polens (German Labor Party of Poland)

DKuWB  Deutscher Kultur- und Wirtschaftsbund (German Culture and Economic League)

DKVP  Deutsche Katholische Volkspartei (German Catholic People's Party)

DNVP  Deutschnationale Volkspartei (German National People's Party, Germany)

DP  Deutsche Partei (German Party, proposed 1920, never founded)

DP  Deutsche Partei (German Party, Upper Silesia)

DSAP  Deutsche Sozialistische Arbeitgeberpartei Polens (German Socialist Labor Party in Poland, 1925–1939)

DSP  Deutsche Sozialdemokratische Partei Polens (German Social Democratic Party in Poland, Bydgoszcz)

DtB  Deutschtumsbund zur Wahrung der Minderheitenrechte (German Dom League for the Protection of Minority Rights, 1921–1923)
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Abbreviations and Acronyms

DV, also DViSuS  Deutsche Vereinigung im Sejm und Senat (German Union in Sejm and Senate, 1923–1934)
DV, also DVW  Deutsche Vereinigung in Westpolen (German Union in Western Poland, 1934–1939)
DVP  Deutsche Volkspartei (German People’s Party, Germany)
DVV  Deutscher Volksverband (German People’s Union, 1924–1939)
EWZ  Einwandererzentrale (Immigration Central Office)
JDP  Jungdeutsche Partei für Polen (Young German Party for Poland, Bielsko, 1929–1939)
LWW  Landsmannschaft Weichsel-Warthe (postwar expellee organization for Germans from interwar Poland)
NSDAP  Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Workers’ Party; Nazi Party, Germany)
PPS  Polska Partia Socjalistyczna (Polish Socialist Party)
RDP  Rat der Deutschen in Polen (Council of the Germans in Poland)
VB  Volksbund (People’s League, Upper Silesia, 1922–1939)
VDA  Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland (Association for Germans Abroad); after 1934, Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland (People’s League for Germans Abroad)
VDR  Volksdeutscher Rat (Ethnic German Council, Germany)
VoMi  Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle (Ethnic German Liaison Office)
ZAG  Zentral-Arbeits-Gemeinschaft (also Zentralarbeitsgemeinschaft; Central Labor Community)
ZOKZ  Związek Obrony Kresów Zachodnich (Union for the Defense of the Western Borderlands); after 1934, Polski Związek Zachodni (Polish Western Union; PZZ)