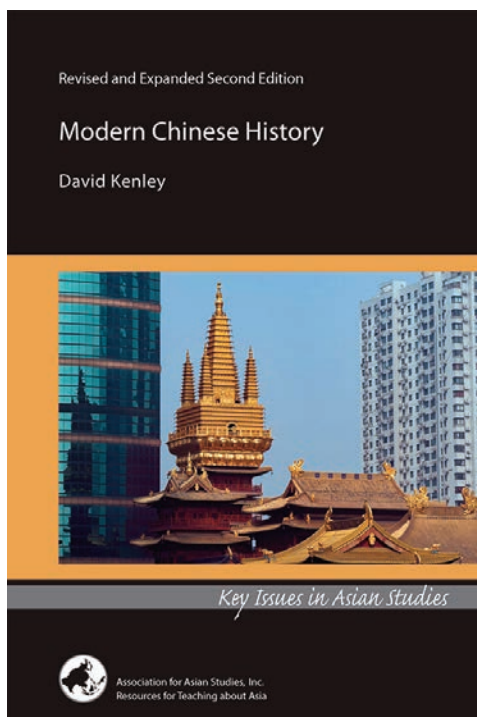


Key Issues in Asian Studies: Modern Chinese History

By David Kenley



During the 2020 US presidential election, Republican candidate Donald Trump frequently referred to his Democratic opponent as “Beijing Biden,” accusing him of currying favor from the Communist Party leadership in China, the same individuals Trump claimed were responsible for the global spread of the so-called “China Virus.” Joe Biden responded by condemning Beijing for its treatment of China’s Uighur minority, suggesting that he was the only candidate who would stand up to Chinese President Xi Jinping in the name of human rights. This fixation with China is not simply a product of US politics. Australia, the UK, Japan, India, and a host of other nations have recently focused greater attention on China and its tremendous influence on global affairs. As educators, we have the weighty responsibility to help our students understand the complexities of the international community and China’s significant role within it.

Since the first edition of *Modern Chinese History* was published in 2012, much has changed. President Xi Jinping has consolidated power to levels unseen in a generation and Beijing is playing an uncharacteristically assertive role in North Korea, India, the South China Sea, and elsewhere. Furthermore, historians have continued to amend the orthodox interpretations of China’s past. Recently, scholars have readdressed such topics as Chinese regionalism, nationalism, labor movements, the Sino-Japanese War, and the Communist

Revolution. Because of all these changes, a revised second edition of *Modern Chinese History* is certainly needed.

Modern Chinese History provides a concise, accessible introduction to China designed specifically for high school and lower-division college students, as well as for general readers. The text is organized around the themes of cosmopolitanism and exceptionalism. The first theme, cosmopolitanism, highlights the role of international, cross-cultural encounters in Chinese history. Scholarship has shown that China has rarely been an isolated, closed society. During the modern era in particular, the Chinese have continuously engaged with their Asian neighbors and the larger world. Even within its borders, China is a multi-ethnic empire wherein numerous groups are in constant interaction, including Han Chinese, Uighurs, Tibetans, Mongols, and many others. These cross-cultural contacts have always been two-sided, with government officials, intellectuals, and merchants skillfully interacting with the larger world for their own perceived benefit.

The second theme critically evaluates the concept of Chinese exceptionalism, the belief that China's history does not conform to widely accepted norms or patterns for nation-states. Exceptionalism is not necessarily the opposite of cosmopolitanism, but it does suggest that China follows its own path, regardless of interactions with other nations. An example of this might be Deng Xiaoping’s so-called “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics,” implying that China’s march toward economic liberalization will be unique from Russia’s, Britain’s, or any other nation’s. The second edition of *Modern Chinese History* identifies historical patterns as well as aberrations in light of Chinese exceptionalism. Along the way, it highlights the roles of peasants, soldiers, intellectuals, and officials, including both men and women, as they influence their society and culture.

As with the other texts in the Key Issues series, *Modern Chinese History* will enhance a wide variety of humanities and social science courses at both the high school and university level. Teachers of world history courses and Asian surveys will find it particularly helpful, as will anyone with an interest in modern China. Because of its important and growing role in international affairs, all global citizens have a responsibility to understand and appreciate China’s seminal role in the twenty first century.

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Teaching About Asia in a Time of Pandemic

Please keep an eye out for a new AAS Asia Shorts/EAA collaborative edited volume—*Teaching About Asia in a Time of Pandemic*—available via the AAS website in November. David Kenley, author of the Key Issues in Asia Studies volume *Modern Chinese History*, is the guest editor of the volume.

In the spring of 2020, educators suddenly found themselves teaching remotely as they and their students began a multiweek period of pandemic-induced isolation. As weeks turned to months, administrators announced that students would not return to campus until the following academic year and perhaps even longer. Teachers quickly scrambled to design new pedagogical approaches suitable to a socially-distanced education. *Teaching About Asia in a Time of Pandemic* presents many lessons learned by educators during the COVID-19 outbreak.

The volume consists of two sections. Section one includes chapters discussing how to teach Asian history, politics, culture, and society using examples and case studies emerging from the pandemic. Section two focuses on the pedagogical tools and methods that teachers can employ to teach Asian topics beyond the traditional face-to-face classroom. Both sections are designed for undergraduate instructors as well as high school teachers using prose that is easily accessible for non-specialists. The volume is a collaborative work between the AAS Asia Shorts series and the AAS pedagogical journal *Education about Asia*, exemplifying the high standards of both publishing ventures.