

his search for the early life story of the daughter he and his wife adopted in 2004. He never fully answers his questions about how she came to be abandoned, but along the way he encounters a family that made a living supplying babies to orphanages. Tong's interview with these baby sellers—which they agreed to seemingly in the hope that grateful American adoptive parents would send them money—is quite shocking. This part of the book provides the backstory for a report Tong aired on *Marketplace* in 2010.<sup>3</sup>

The personalized history that Tong presents is best-suited to an introductory class at the high school or college level. I assigned the book to my advanced college history seminar, and the students with the least knowledge of China found it the most interesting. Some thought it over-emphasized the “darker sides” of modern Chinese history. All agreed it is well-written. Each chapter of Tong's book could serve as a starting point for research papers on such topics as China's twentieth-century connections with Japan, education for women in the 1920s and '30s, the exodus of elites in 1949, the fate of those sent to labor camps, economic development since 1978, young people in contemporary China, and the connection between family planning policies and international adoption of Chinese girls. The conversational tone Tong adopts enlivens the book, as does the framing—an American reporter takes us with him as he tracks down the stories that shaped his family across 120 years of tumultuous Chinese history. ■

#### NOTES

1. See, for example, Ning Wang, *Banished to the Great Northern Wilderness: Political Exile and Re-education in Mao's China* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017).
2. Among the newest entries to this genre of Cultural Revolution memoirs is one written by the daughter of China's most famous twentieth-century painter, herself a concert pianist. See Xu Fangfang, *Galloping Horses: Artist Xu Beihong and His Family in Mao's China* (St. Louis: Beihong Arts Publishing, 2016).
3. The story Tong reported, “The Dark Side of Chinese Adoptions,” filed May 5, 2010, is available here: <https://tinyurl.com/ydy6575e>.

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## China in the 21st Century

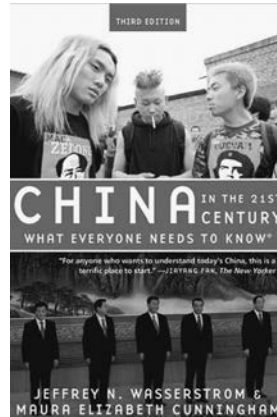
### *What Everyone Needs to Know* (third edition)

BY JEFFREY N. WASSERSTROM AND  
MAURA ELIZABETH CUNNINGHAM

NEW YORK: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2018

240 PAGES, ISBN: 978-0190659080, PAPERBACK

Reviewed by Karen Kane



Jeffrey Wasserstrom, Professor of History at the University of California, Irvine, first published *China in the 21st Century: What Everyone Needs to Know* in 2010. In that year, China was still advertising the mascots of the 2008 Olympics and crowds were lining up to be photographed at the Bird's Nest Stadium. Hu Jintao held the positions of Chairman of the CPC Central Military Commission and General Secretary of the Communist Party. Under the surface, political factions maneuvered and the state of the Politburo Standing Committee was like “nine dragons taming the

waters.” Wasserstrom's slim volume provided general readers, students, and ambassadors an introduction to China in less time than it takes to fly there from the US. While some reviews by students said it was a tad dry and some scholars said it assumed quite a bit of previous knowledge, it was generally well-regarded as comprehensive and accessible. By the time the second volume was released in 2012, Hu had given up his posts and stepped down to be replaced by a man resembling Winnie the Pooh, who had moved increasingly close to Hu in government photos. On November 15, 2012, Xi Jinping was elected General Secretary of the Communist Party. In March 2013, he would become President of the People's Republic of China.

In October 2012, anticipating this once-in-a-decade leadership transition, Wasserstrom was about to sign off on proofs of the second edition of *China in the 21st Century*. He was concerned about the book's final chapter, “The Future.” This edition had managed to capture the sensational scandal of Bo Xilai and his wife in 2012. Wasserstrom (and his colleague Maura Cunningham) was confident that scandal would not derail Xi's rise to power, but wanted to confirm his predictions. The author was granted permission by Oxford University Press to hold off on publication until Xi's ascent was assured. His careful analysis would prove correct. Xi's consolidation of power and ever-expanding list of titles was unprecedented in modern Chinese history.

After the second edition was published in 2013, Wasserstrom gave several joint talks with Cunningham that revealed his evolving thinking about the country's past and present. The fully revised and updated third edition is coauthored by Wasserstrom and Cunningham—currently Social Media Manager at the Association of Asian Studies and Associate at the University of Michigan's Lieberthal-Rogel Center for Chinese Studies—and reflects this changed perspective. The accent color on the cover of this latest edition has gone from red to green as a marker of the importance of environmental issues in China today.

The new edition features an expanded discussion of Xi's reforms, insightful perspectives on Hong Kong's shifting political status, changing

relations between the PRC and the United States under the Donald Trump administration, and the shifting balance of power within East Asia.

This edition has been extremely well-received. Evan Osnos of *The New Yorker* writes in the editorial reviews by the book's publisher that Wasserstrom "has found the perfect collaborator in Maura Cunningham. Together, they have produced, analyzed, and digested more of the best research on China's past and present than a reader could ever hope to match. And now they have taken on the hardest question of all: what truly matters most in understanding China? In this crystalline and up-to-date edition, they have given us the answers. I keep this book within reach at all times."<sup>1</sup>

But, as in the first edition, this one begins with the uncontested assertion that "to understand today's China, it is crucial to know something about its past." Each subsection is prefaced by a provocative question. Part 1, "Historical Legacies," includes three chapters: "Schools of Thought," "Imperial China," and "Revolutions and Revolutionaries," the first opening with, among other questions, "Who was Confucius?," "What was his political vision?," and "What was the status of Confucianism in 1949?," followed by consideration of its fate during the repressive Mao period and the current revival of official Confucianism and the global proliferation of Confucius Institutes. Chapter 2 discusses the main early dynasties and the dynastic cycle, covering foreign relations and internal governance, including rebellion, focusing in particular on the Ming and Qing. The authors bring a useful historical perspective to bear on recent events, arguing that imperial China is still evident in PRC political culture, noting the invocation by current leaders of past humiliations by foreign powers. Chapter 3 examines China's revolutionary history, asking, "How did the Communists beat the Nationalists?," "Was Mao a monster?," and "Why hasn't Mao been repudiated by China's current leaders?."

Part 2 covers "The Present and the Future." The first chapter, "From Mao to Now," looks at the One-Child Policy, the Tiananmen protests, and the 2008 Olympics. "US-China Misunderstandings" encourages readers to avoid the stereotype of China as a monolithic entity, discussing its ethnic, regional, and even generational diversity in a comparative context. The authors ask whether the prevalent Chinese and US perspectives on contentious issues are so divergent that belief in the other's bias is bound to be reinforced by what each says. The Tibet issue is used as an instructive example of how profoundly differing perspectives reinforce mutual attributions of prejudice.

The final chapter, "The Future," raises the most provocative questions. Will China become the world's dominant economic power? Is it likely to become a democracy? Wasserstrom and Cunningham confess that "our sense of uncertainty while working on the second edition was nothing, compared to what we have experienced revising this edition's section on 'The Future.'" But they are confident that understanding China's past and present is essential for anyone wanting a fully informed grasp of the twenty-first-century world.

Is the volume appropriate for both students as well as ambassadors? Some students might find the first chapters as dry as the terra-cotta soldiers, but, in general, ancient history is presented in palatable chunks devoid of small details and spiced with constant references to Western history, culture, and current events. The endnotes—ranging from often-requested information on romanizing Chinese to the history of the Great Wall to the origin of fortune cookies—will be useful for educators. The further resources section leads one to accessible articles on, for example, Chinese nationalism, environmental problems, and the control of the internet (with its own "Great Wall"). To help readers stay abreast of rapidly changing current events, readers are referred to a website in the works ([bit.ly/MoreChina](http://bit.ly/MoreChina)) that will contain podcasts, and links to Twitter feeds and other websites. They have continued to jointly publish articles and conduct lecture tours, as well as follow their separate research interests (Cunningham is working on a graphic history and blogs about knitting, as well as political topics.)

Wasserstrom and Cunningham encourage readers to see parallels between China and the United States, and to cultivate more empathy and less arrogance in their understanding. The beginning of empathy is getting to know the other. *China in the 21st Century* provides a great resource for that quest. ■

#### NOTES

1. See the Reviews and Awards section of the book's page on the Oxford University Press website at <https://tinyurl.com/y8o8amdm>.

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