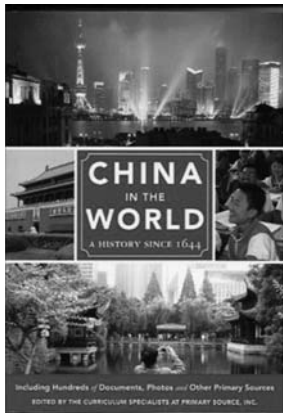


CHINA IN THE WORLD

A History of China Since 1644

BOSTON: CHENG TSUI COMPANY, 2008
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Reviewed by Caryn White Stedman



While there is a growing body of literature that places China in its global context and seeks to challenge the myth of Chinese isolation (Hansen, Cohen, Waley-Cohen, etc.), few of these works provide practitioners with the kind of curricular and instructional tools necessary to challenge the standard textbook presentations of a self-isolated empire. *China in the World: A History Since 1644*, a collaborative work edited by the curriculum specialists at Primary Source, Inc. in

Massachusetts, attempts just this for teachers of modern Chinese and world history at both the college and high school levels.

After laying out the geographical and late Ming historical setting, the book divides modern Chinese history into four large conceptual and chronological periods: “The Qing Dynasty,” “The Struggle to Create a Unified China,” “The People’s Republic,” and “Contemporary China.” In its chronological approach, *China in the World* does not differ from most modern histories of China. The text moves through an examination of the Qing and three transformative rulers (Kangxi, Yongzhen, and Qianlong), the evolving nature of Chinese foreign relations in the Qing, the challenges of the nineteenth century (both external and internal), responses to them, and the end of imperial rule. From there, the text continues its chronological examination of modern China through the early Republican Period, the two global wars, the internal struggles to define modern China, the Chinese civil war, and the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. The final section of the book, as one would expect, explores China’s reemergence on the world stage and poses questions about the future. A quick glance at the table of contents might indicate that little in this volume is particularly radical or different from the way many histories and most textbooks approach modern China.

Once one delves into each section, however, it becomes apparent that this is not a standard narrative history, nor is it any kind of standard textbook. The second impression one has upon perusing the book is that *China in the World* is a reader of Chinese history. Each chapter contains a collection of primary sources from the period, some translated from the Chinese, some in the original English, and some visual sources. Most instructors of Chinese history and many instructors of world history are familiar with the other well-known and often-used

collections of primary source materials on Chinese history (Ebry, the de Bary-edited *Sources* series, and the Cheng, Lestz, Spence documentary collection). This volume contains many of the same documents found in those collections. Some are standard and familiar to teachers of modern Chinese or world history—excerpts from *The Analects*, *The Sacred Edicts*, the Treaty of Nerchinsk, Qian Long’s reply to Macartney, Lin Zexu’s letter to Queen Victoria, Gladstone’s 1840 speech to the House of Commons, excerpts from the Treaty of Nanjing, and the autobiography of Yung Wing. The collection of documents found in *China in the World* also includes excerpts from such well-known revolutionary thinkers, philosophers, and writers as Zou Rong, Qiu Jin, Hu Shih, Mao Zedong, Ding Ling, and works from outside observers—Ida Pruitt, Pearl Buck, and Joseph Stilwell among them. Major literary works—*Dream of the Red Mansions*, *Tea House*, *The Scholars*—are also included. One of the features, and not the only one, that sets *China in the World* apart from these other collections, is the accompanying CD-ROM that includes full versions of many of the documents as well as photographs and video clips.

Each chapter of *China in the World* begins with a brief outline of the contents, a statement of the organizing idea of the chapter, and key questions and terms. The chapter on “China’s Foreign Relations 1644–1839,” for example, offers the following as its organizing idea:

Despite restrictions enforced by the Qing dynasty, an active exchange of goods and ideas continued to exist between China and the Western powers. However, in the mid-eighteenth century, Europeans, especially Great Britain, began pressing the Qing government for broader access to Chinese markets. (59)

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... it is unabashedly a teaching volume that successfully provides the instructor with both background material and highly effective pedagogical approaches to help students understand the complexities of modern Chinese history.

This is followed by several questions, including “How and why did Western nations try to change diplomatic and trade relations with China? To what extent were they successful in the period 1638–1839?” The key terms for this chapter include both generic vocabulary (decentralized, homage) and specialized items (*chinoiserie*, kowtow). The text follows with an essay in which additional terms are introduced. The text often includes the Chinese characters for the term. For example, the text introduces the creation by Nurhaci in 1638 of the Office of Border Affairs and places both the Romanized Chinese name (*Lifan Yuan*) and the characters in parentheses. Later in the same essay, however, the text introduces the Canton System with Chinese characters, but the lack of Romanization for the term is puzzling in a volume that is clearly meant for generalists. The book’s introduction states, “the first time that key words or phrases appear, we have also included the word written in simplified Chinese characters.” Yet the background essay for Chapter 8, “The Early Republican Period,” includes the character translation for “Shandong Province” but not for “Shanxi Province,” though this is the first instance in the text for both. Thus, one is left to conclude that “Shandong Province” is a key term, but “Shanxi Province” is not, though the value of having the characters without Romanization limits the usefulness of this strategy.

The two-to-four page background essays in each chapter are well cited with explanatory footnotes. They make no assumptions about prior knowledge, and they are written so that they can be used by both teachers and students. A dozen or so primary source documents follow the introductory essay in each chapter, the notable exception being Chapter Fifteen, which includes only one document, the Joint Communiqué of the United States of America and the People’s Republic of China (known popularly as the “Shanghai Communiqué,” though the book does not identify it by this term).

The editors of the volume recognize the need for students to use documents analytically, and they have provided numerous thematic activities that require students to use the documents to “do history.” Some of the activities include “creative extensions” and “extended research.” Each chapter has one or two pages of suggested resources that include some of the most recent scholarship on modern China, relevant Web sites, and an annotated list of film and video resources, some with teaching suggestions.

There are three broad timelines covering the periods 1600–1911, 1911–1949, and 1949–2001. Each chapter concludes with a piece called “A Closer Look.” These are as diverse as exploring the Soong sisters, a discussion of *The Diary of Lei Feng*, a comparison of Zhao Ziyang and Li Peng, and an analysis of a photograph of a middle school for the children of migrant workers.

The title of the text, *China in the World*, and its introductory essay by William C. Kirby, suggests that this work puts modern Chinese history into a global context for students. Professor Kirby states, quite accurately, that “China cannot be studied in isolation.” (ix) But how successful is this work in helping students break through the tradition of scholarship that “emphasized China’s insularity vis-à-vis other cultures?” (ix)

The introductory essay on the late Ming (Chapter 2) mentions global connections with respect to the early presence of Europeans, and makes no mention of China’s extensive South China Sea trade, or relations with Japan or Korea. Why not include Zhang Han’s “Essay on Merchants,” widely available in English translation (Ebry 1993 and Reilly 2000) to provide students with a sense of the debate in the Ming court on China’s international engagements? The text mentions, in one sentence, the influx of new world silver, stating “this created new wealth and a corresponding desire for luxuries,” (19) but does not mention the economic or demographic impact of new world food products.

The section on Qing foreign relations includes excerpts from the Treaty of Nerchinsk, but does not highlight the significance of this treaty as an example of the Qing’s engagement in international diplomacy outside of the so-called tribute system. The text makes no comment on the excerpt, and the CD-ROM states simply,

This was China’s first treaty with a Western power. The need for negotiations came about because of conflicts on the Chinese–Russian border among traders and settlers in the area. Two Jesuits had a hand in drafting the treaty and worked as translators between the two parties.

The essays and documents in the final chapters focus on China’s reemergence on the world stage and include discussions of China’s relations with its East Asian neighbors, Africa, and India, in addition to its relationship with the West.

While the book’s attempt to assist students in understanding China in its global context is incomplete, it is unabashedly a teaching volume that successfully provides the instructor with both background material and highly effective pedagogical approaches to help students understand the complexities of modern Chinese history. ■

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