

The second part of the book is a series of thirty primary documents, ranging from letters describing the journey from Europe to Asia to Ricci's letters from China to excerpts from Ricci's voluminous literary output to Chinese reactions to Ricci's activities in China. In short, the primary texts follow roughly the same fourfold topical division as the brief history. An interesting inclusion is document 24: Ricci's famous world map set against a Ming dynasty map from the same period. This is an illustration of how maps, paintings, or other visual media can be just as much primary texts as literary texts and can be "read" just as much as an excerpt from a learned discourse. Particularly valuable in the documentary section is the inclusion of Chinese descriptions of Matteo Ricci. Document 13, for example, is an excerpt of a biography of Ricci by the Chinese official Liu Chengfan. Liu describes Ricci as a Buddhist and includes many of the main objections to Westerners then current at the Ming court, namely that Westerners were pirates in the South China Sea and that Western missionaries posed a security threat, especially if they were allowed to reside outside Macao in the interior of China.

The documents are well-chosen for their diversity of vantage points: both Westerners and Chinese voices are represented, descriptions of the Chinese are included alongside Chinese descriptions of Ricci, and a good mix of personal letters and official literary output is included. In the classroom, it would be difficult to use Hsia's book as a stand-alone resource, but combined with a more comprehensive, narrative work on world history or East-West interaction, it could serve as a valuable resource for both high school students and university students. Perhaps the most useful strategy for using this book as a teaching resource would be to hold up behavioral/theological norms at the time and contrast them with what most people today would consider a more enlightened stance on these norms. For example, Ricci rails against not allowing natives to become fully functioning priests. Hsia provides no commentary on why the Catholic Church at the time did not allow this; however, by including the rationale, students will be in a better position to deduce the absurdity of such theological exclusivism. This might then lead into a fruitful discussion of how our own modern-day preconceptions might color our thinking as twenty-first-century critical thinkers.

Similarly, using Ricci's maps in an uncritical way as paradigms of scientific superiority, as opposed to Chinese maps of the period, can lead to the danger of students accepting cultural assumptions uncritically. For example, if we simply present two maps, one a product of Western enlightenment and another a product of medieval China, and then contrast them, of course most Western students will immediately accept that the Western map is the most "accurate." However, reading maps involves much more than simply a sense of accuracy. All maps are inherently biased and inaccurate, so a discussion of how maps are biased would be much more fruitful than a simple side-by-side comparison for accuracy, and yet the reader of this volume is not led toward such a discussion.

These are minor quibbles, however. They should in no way take away from Hsia's valuable contribution to the field. Paired with a suitable companion volume, this book can lead to many fruitful and critical discussions about the nature of East-West encounters in the early modern period. This alone makes Hsia's book a valuable addition to the field of early modern history. ■

MICHAEL LAVER is Assistant Professor of History at the Rochester Institute of Technology, where he teaches East Asian history, as well as classes on European interaction with Asia. His research focuses primarily on the Dutch East India Company and, more broadly, early modern Japan. His most recent work is titled *The Sakoku Edicts and the Politics of Tokugawa Legitimacy* (Cambria Press, 2011).

China's Twentieth Century

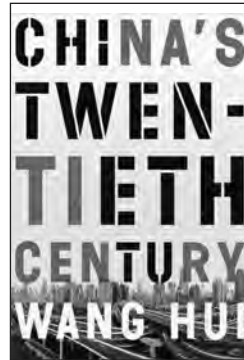
Revolution, Retreat, and the Road to Equality

BY WANG HUI

NEW YORK: VERSO BOOKS, 2016

368 PAGES, ISBN: 978-1781689066, PAPERBACK

Reviewed by Zach Smith



What positive lessons can China take from its tumultuous twentieth century? Given the tragedies of the Mao era and the relentless pace of ongoing economic and social change in China, it may be tempting to simply ignore China's revolutionary period, as the 2008 Olympic opening ceremonies did in its retelling of Chinese history for a global audience. Yet in his new book, *China's Twentieth Century*, leading literary critic and intellectual historian Wang Hui argues that the twentieth century is not only essential for explaining China's present, but may even provide solutions for its future. As a member of China's "New Left," Wang's intervention into both Chinese- and English-language histories of China is both politically charged and theoretically rich, exploring the possibilities for equality and justice that were created and then suppressed during this period in China's recent past.

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Though its title may suggest a general survey, Wang’s book does not seek to offer a contiguous narrative of twentieth-century Chinese history. Instead, it offers six critical essays, translated by several scholars and edited by Saul Thomas. These essays seek to define the central terms of China’s twentieth-century politics and suggest applications to twenty-first-century problems. In particular, Wang focuses on the politicization of the state, culture, and the masses during China’s “short twentieth century,” from the 1911 Revolution to the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976. Wang notes at the start that many of the ideas most central to this politicization—class, party, nation-state, mass line, even the idea of a “twentieth century” itself—were *yiwu* (alien things) whose evolution produced unprecedented new forms of political practice and, ultimately, a new China.

The first three chapters closely examine specific episodes in this era of alien things—the 1911 Revolution to overthrow the Qing dynasty, the New Culture Movement of the late 1910s, and the Korean War, or as it is known in China, the War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea. These chapters are valuable to the teacher of world history because of the ways they situate China at the forefront of important global trends. For example, Wang asserts in chapter 2 that the 1917 Russian Revolution—long considered a seminal event in world history surveys—actually followed a blueprint of nationalist revolution and socialist nation-building laid out in China’s own antimonarchical revolution six years earlier. Similarly, chapter 4 shows how the concept of “people’s war” developed during the Chinese 1950–1953 campaign to aid North Korea served as a template not only for the Việt Nam War, but for broader anticolonial nationalist movements.

The latter three chapters focus on contemporary challenges: the decline of political representation following China’s market reforms, the

growing economic hardships of migrant workers and urban consumers, and the ongoing ethnic tensions in the autonomous regions of Tibet and Xinjiang. Though other scholars place the roots of these problems in Maoist era policies, Wang resists the suggestion that these challenges can be solved by simply abandoning Chinese-style socialism in favor of multiparty liberal democracy.

Wang’s collection of essays is provocative but less accessible than other present-focused accounts of the Chinese past, such as Chinese novelist Yu Hua’s *China in Ten Words* (Vintage, 2012). As an effort to revise existing historiography, Wang assumes that his readers are already familiar with the major (and some minor) beats of modern Chinese history. Furthermore, his deep theoretical engagement with philosophers such as John Rawls and Amartya Sen may further hamper the book’s suitability as an introductory history text. Nevertheless, when used alongside a more general overview, the book’s latter chapters offer a unique if politically biased perspective on China’s contemporary social problems that students are not likely to find in accounts by British and American scholars. ■

ZACH SMITH is an Assistant Professor of History at the University of Central Arkansas, where he also serves as Coordinator of the Asian Studies program. He specializes in the intellectual and cultural history of modern China, and his current book project focuses on the relationship between popular education, citizenship, and colonial forms of power during China’s tumultuous twentieth century.

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