

Broadening the Horizons of Chinese History

Discourses, Syntheses, and Comparisons

BY RAY HUANG

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In *Broadening the Horizons of Chinese History*, Ray Huang investigates events in China from a long-term perspective. The work is actually a compilation of several previously-presented essays. In many ways, the text reads more like an intimate lecture than a jargon-filled monograph. Inserting several interesting details about his own life, Huang writes as if he is seeking to persuade and enlighten a younger generation of scholars.

As stated several times throughout the book, Huang's central thesis is that modern, rational, dynamic societies require "mathematical manageability." In other words, everything from governmental taxation to free market commodity exchanges must be conducted in mathematically-defined terms. At the same time, the state must create laws and structures necessary for these transactions to occur. Yet, as Huang points out, until the twentieth century this did not happen in China. China was, to put it bluntly, unmodern and mathematically unmanageable.

During the last century, however, China has made great strides toward achieving mathematical manageability. By so doing, the Chinese state has "merged" into the same historical pattern as the West. Though this transition remains imperfect, and though at times it has been painful, the Chinese have accomplished mathematical manageability more quickly than most Western societies.

By emphasizing mathematical manageability as the yardstick for modernity, Huang hopes to avoid the Eurocentric timelines that Western historians have imposed on the non-Western world. Nevertheless, the result seems to be much the same—China's history is merging with the West (rather than the other way around, or not merging at all). Furthermore, Huang has given too little credit to other historians, such as Mark Elvin, who have also argued that Eurocentric historical eras must be reexamined in the case of China.

Huang's work will be immensely beneficial to not only China historians, but to world historians as well. While probably inappropriate for high school students, secondary school teachers and undergraduate professors will find Huang's work quite helpful. As one of the senior historians in the China field, Huang's structuralist approach remains engaging and interesting. ■

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Chinese Aesthetics and Literature

A Reader

EDITED BY CORINNE H. DALE

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The past few decades have seen a growing demand among teachers and scholars of Western literature for clear analyses of Chinese aesthetics. While there are many fine introductory materials, there remains a need for what might be called "intermediate" materials that prepare the serious reader for specialized works. *Chinese Aesthetics and Literature: A Reader* admirably fills part of that gap, with eleven well-written pieces by experts in Chinese literature who speak to a wide audience.

Corinne Dale, Professor of English at Belmont University, has drawn the essays in her collection from a wide range of works, and therein lies its strength, as well as its relatively minor weaknesses. Beginning with the "big picture," Pauline Yu and Theodore Hutters articulate the broad outlines of the "imaginative universe" of Chinese literature with their essay on the implications of the Pangu origin myth for later writing. A rich array of essays follow, including pieces on language, visions of nature, and the "central" tradition in Chinese thought by Roger Ames, Tu Wei-ming, and Wilt and Idema Haft. Subsequent essays round out the picture, with a discussion of gender and moral virtue by Wendy Larson and Stephen Owen's witty analysis of "meaning in the Chinese lyric." Paul Ropp, Elizabeth Wichmann-Walczak, Leo Ou-fan Lee, and Yan Haiping introduce the reader to the major works and settings of Chinese fiction and drama, all the way up to the twenty-first century. Howard Goldblatt's closing essay contextualizes Chinese writing for Western readers.

The greatest compliment that can be given to the volume as a whole is that it inspires the reader to pursue further reading. The notes give ambitious readers advice on the translations and scholarship that might serve them in further studies. Only two small criticisms emerged from my reading. First, the discussion of literature overwhelms that of aesthetics. Second, the reader who is not fully aware that the pieces in the volume were collected from other writings may be frustrated by the varying tone from one essay to another, since the individual pieces were written for different audiences and at different times over the past twenty years. They do not read with the consistency one hopes to find in essays written specifically for edited volumes. Dale's chapter introductions are nonetheless helpful, and the volume is an admirable one that pulls the reader toward further study of the Chinese literary tradition. ■

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