

China in World History

BY PAUL S. ROPP

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2009

208 PAGES, ISBN: 978-0195381955, PAPERBACK

Reviewed by Karl R. Neumann

Writing a short history of Chinese civilization is fraught with challenges. How does one decide which events and trends from millennia of written history to include or exclude? What individual persons and ideas best represent the cultural and intellectual prolificacy of a country with the geographic dimensions and human diversity of a country like China? Given the complexity of answering these questions, it would be very easy to discount Paul S. Ropp's *China in World History* as simply a cursory exploration of a topic requiring lengthier treatment. Ropp quickly dismisses this concern through his keen ability to summarize succinctly the key trends of each of China's major historical periods while simultaneously interjecting the stories of individuals or cultural developments within those eras with a fluidity, detail, and wit that is sure to keep the attention of advanced high school and older readers.

One particularly interesting and appealing aspect of Ropp's survey is his attention to the role women have played throughout Chinese history. Even though the text follows a fairly conventional narrative path from China's prehistory to the modern day, women of note and influence are mentioned with regularity, thus underlying their integral contributions to what has, at times, been a very patriarchal society. Ropp's vignettes on such diverse figures as Lady Hao, Ban Gu, Li Qingzhao, and Empress Cixi are enlightening despite their brevity and are representative of how he treats other groups in Chinese society such as intellectuals, artists, and political figures.

In addition to its excellent writing, *China in World History* is accompanied by many features that are sure to be of use to students encountering the whole of Chinese history for the first time. A brief chronology is accompanied by recommendations for further reading that include additional in-depth surveys of Chinese history, primary source anthologies, and monographs related to the issues of particular eras. Finally, the book's reference section directs readers to websites that include multimedia resources that directly parallel and enhance the images and maps provided in the book.

Used in conjunction with teacher-selected primary sources and other ancillary materials, *China in World History* is certain to be a useful core text to any world history course or introductory class in Chinese history and civilization. ■

KARL R. NEUMANN is currently teaching courses in East Asian Studies, Western Civilization, and US History at the Dana Hall School in Wellesley, Massachusetts. A three-year teaching experience in Koshigaya, Japan and hiking in the Japanese countryside inspired his deep interest in East Asian Studies. He has also participated in two Korean Studies fellowships sponsored by the Korea Society and most recently studied in Xi'an through the 2009 NEH Summer Institute for Teachers, coordinated by the China Institute of New York.

Dreaming in Chinese Mandarin Lessons in Life, Love, and Language

BY DEBORAH FALLOWS

NEW YORK: WALKER AND COMPANY, 2010

208 PAGES, ISBN: 978-0802779137, HARDBACK

Reviewed by Emily Gammon

Breaking the Code: Language Is Key

At once charming, eye opening, and educational, *Dreaming in Chinese: Mandarin Lessons in Life, Love, and Language* is a literary journey using the Mandarin language as a tour guide. Deborah Fallows intends to unlock Chinese culture for her readers through an exploration of the language and of the nuances of Chinese communication. She uses her own experience of living in China to illustrate the depth, texture, and often unexpected tenderness of the Chinese people. The work has value as a classroom tool due to a scope that encompasses linguistics, Asian culture, personal memoir, history, and travel. Students and teachers of a variety of subjects can appreciate the book, as it is not a pedagogical language text but rather an immersive cultural experience.

Fallows, a PhD in linguistics, reflects on the three years she spent living in Shanghai and Beijing. She shares her experience through a Western lens, admitting, "Our entry to China was rough. The first month went by in a daze . . . As for the language, the longer we were in China, the more engaged I became with Chinese" (14).

While reading, I was sometimes unsure whether I was reading a personal memoir or a text on Mandarin; in actuality, the work falls somewhere between these two topics. A discussion of the construction of the written or spoken word, combined with an illustration of the words or phrases as part of daily life, completes the body of each chapter. By the end of these chapters, Fallows is able to skillfully tie the language, the history of the language, and the influence of the language on the culture of everyday contemporary Chinese life together. She says,

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I often found a connection between some point of the language—a particular word or the use of a phrase, for example—and how that point could elucidate something very “Chinese” I would encounter in my everyday life in China. The language helped me understand what I saw on the streets or on our travels around the country—how people made their livings, their habits, their behavior toward each other, how they dealt with adversity, and how they celebrated. (15)

Fallows readily admits that Mandarin is one of the most difficult languages to learn, but she acknowledges the difficulty cannot simply be explained by the seemingly arbitrary nature of the language but more so by the intricacy and complexity of it. She deconstructs the language layer by layer and examines the written as well as the spoken word. She explains that most people, including the Chinese, are not equally fluent in both the spoken word and the written. Each element of the language has its own intricacies and difficulties.

This cleverly constructed memoir was an enjoyable read and a truly refreshing discussion of Chinese culture. Fallows employs her engaging writing voice to undermine stereotypes in her discussion of Chinese life, love, and culture, and I found the work to be interesting, intriguing, and intelligent. ■

EMILY GAMMON is a graduate student in the Department of Theatre and Dance at the University of Colorado. She holds an undergraduate degree in both Theatre and in Secondary Education (English concentration) from the University of Maine, Orono. An actor and educator, she has worked with pre-kindergarten to undergraduate students in topics and subjects ranging from storytelling and acting to literature and writing.

Modern Japan A Historical Survey (Fourth Edition)

BY MIKISO HANE AND LOUIS G. PEREZ

BOULDER: WESTVIEW PRESS, 2009

578 PAGES, ISBN 978-0-8133-4409-6, PAPERBACK

Reviewed by Jason Morgan

History teachers at all levels are always looking for solid bits of information that they can use in their lectures in order to shore up the essentially narrative structure of history instruction. If this premise is true, then Mikiso Hane and Louis G. Perez’s *Modern Japan: A Historical Survey* (Fourth Edition), a treasure trove of figures and facts, will become perhaps the go-to book about modern Japan on the secondary and post-secondary educator’s bookshelf.

The chapter and section headings are clear and intuitive, following a straightforward chronological flow that allows the readers to position themselves back within the context of the particular period under discussion. Even those new to the study of modern Japan will likely find themselves easily able to situate their increasing understanding of the subject within the then-current social, political, cultural, and economic milieu.

This classic style of history writing also serves to build a kind of dramatic tension; the reader, being presented with an array of historical facts (and, by extension, possible courses of action), is made to feel the gravity of the choices

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