

BOOK REVIEWS

Modern China

An Encyclopedia of History, Culture, and Nationalism

Wang Ke-wen, Editor

NEW YORK: GARLAND PUBLISHING, 1998
XXXV + 442 PAGES

In this age of large, multivolume publications on China, both past and present, another encyclopedic work on the modern period, albeit a single volume work, is welcome in the library and in the classroom. Moreover, while it is a most difficult task to transform the extremely complex history of modern China into a balanced and coherent reference work, Wang Ke-wen and his collaborators have accepted the challenge and made a fairly good showing of it.

The present work opens with an excellent discussion of the development of nationalism in modern China, wherein the editor explains the various stages through which this spirit has passed, as well as how it has varied from one region to another over time. Following this introductory essay, a section entitled "Entries by Subject" is added to assist the reader in locating various entries in the main body of the text. Following that is a chronology



covering the years 1839 to 1997 and two maps representing modern China. While these two sections are designed to provide the reader with additional guidance on the subject and the period, the maps are so general in outline as to be of little practical use.

The main body of the text contains 404 individual entries authored by the editor and seventy-one contributors. Each of these entries is followed by a brief "References"

section, where various published works on the subject in question are listed so as to provide the reader wishing to explore the subject at greater depth with additional guidance. It is interesting to note that for the most part, the individual contributors to this volume reside in the United States, the remainder being residents of Hong Kong, China, or Taiwan. Comparatively speaking, a significant proportion of the contributors (33 out of 72) are ethnically Chinese in origin and comparatively youthful on average, thus serving to illustrate the important role currently played by individuals having this background in interpreting Chinese history and culture to Western, and particularly American, audiences.

Individuals who choose to consult this work will also be impressed by the energy and erudition of the editor, who has authored approximately one half of all the entries to be found in the book. As the newest encyclopedic work to be devoted to the subject, the text will be found to contain much up-to-date information on figures currently of importance in the Chinese world. Another notable feature of the present work is its use of numerous rare photographs which the authorities at the Nationalist Party Archives in Taiwan have allowed the author to use. Generally speaking, these illustrations of various entries throughout the volume provide an intriguing visual experience for the reader.

On the other hand, taken as a whole, the individual entries that make up this volume will be found to be quite uneven in quality. This may be partly a result of the fact that relatively few entries come from the pens of senior scholars in the field. There is also a lack of conformity in standards between one entry and another, for while some contributors have wisely chosen to hold to established interpretations and to provide references to standard sources in the field, others have chosen instead to advance personal interpretations either unsupported by reliable source data or based only on those of a very general nature. Still others can be faulted for choosing only to cite outdated general works in support of their arguments.

The present work is also disappointing in several other important respects. It is, for instance, not truly encyclopedic in

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nature, for the editor has chosen to focus attention primarily on political events and the lives of individual political figures belonging to the period in question. In doing so he has given little or no attention to other important dimensions of the modern Chinese experience, such as art and religion. There is, for instance, no entry discussing modern developments in Buddhism, Daoism, or Chinese Catholicism. Moreover, the entries devoted to Chinese Protestant movements, such as the Anti-Christian Movement, Christian Missionaries, and the Tianjin Incident, are unfortunately rather uneven in their coverage of these topics.

The entry devoted to a discussion of various anti-Christian movements, for instance, limits itself exclusively to developments belonging to the twentieth century, thereby failing to inform the reader of earlier, formative incidents of this kind. Also, the Tianjin Incident, while related to anti-missionary activities in the nineteenth century, was neither typical of such movements nor the most important of that century. It is also curious that the entry on anti-Christian movements is placed under the general heading of "Society," while the entry discussing the Tianjin Incident is not. In this same general vein, the reader is also likely to be puzzled to discover that the entry on the Unequal Treaties is classified under the subject headings "Sino-Japanese Relations" and "Sino-Russian Relations," but not "Sino-Western Relations."

Despite these imperfections, this work should prove to be useful to the general reader, and in particular those individuals seeking background data on contemporary politics and leading political figures, such as Jiang Zemin, Li Denghui, Yang Shangkun, and Zhao Ziyang. Similarly, the entries entitled "One Country, Two Systems" and "Taiwanese Independence Movement" that relate to current political realities will be found to be highly instructive for the general reader. Taken as a whole, and the various limitations of the text mentioned above notwithstanding, this reference work should prove quite helpful to students majoring in modern history, as well as individuals seeking to familiarize themselves with contemporary Chinese political realities. ■

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Seasons of High Adventure

Edgar Snow in China

By S. Bernard Thomas

BERKELEY: UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS, 1996
XVIII + 416 PAGES



To be successful, a biography must make the reader care about the subject. Whether people are depicted as angels, devils, gods or sinners, the reader must come to care passionately about them and what they do or what happens to them in the course of their lives. Some subjects loom large on the historic stage and by this means are an easy subject to attract the attention of the reader. The names are surrounded in mystery, intrigue, or controversy, and the reader is drawn to follow their stories. For lesser-known individuals, the author must provide the interest to carry the reader through. The title of this book comes from a remark in Edgar Snow's diary. "However well I readjust myself to life in America, my youth, the best part of it, lies ever in the Orient. This was the season of high adventure, experience, and unusual thrills" (p. 13). Although the author provides a great deal of information about Snow, he does not quite engender the excitement of the title, and this alone detracts from the book as something to recommend to secondary-level readers.

Thomas gives us a very good picture of Snow as innately liberal-humanistic with individualist impulses. We get a good picture of the beliefs he held and how they changed as a result of his experiences in China and elsewhere. As he traveled in China, he came to see "the necessity for a revolutionary-style 'people's war' against the Japanese invader, one that would simultaneously advance the twin goals of national and social liberation" (p. 7). As a result of his travels and interviews, his vision of a New World emerged, one that was "decolonized, demilitarized, mutually cooperative, interdependent and at peace" (p. 8). In his letters to family, particularly his father and brother, Snow reveals the "targets of his stark and radical analysis of the state of the world were imperialism (Western and Japanese), militarism (Chinese and Japanese) and fascism (European and Asian)—all of them part of a collapsing global order" (p. 82). Snow developed a strong animus toward British colonialism and its