

suggestions for “Further Reading” that conclude the entry. In between the opening summary and the concluding bibliography may be found not only a chronological account of the emperor’s family background, youth, policies, and initiatives; personal interests; and place in history, but also a one-page sidebar entry on “Wall-Building in Ancient China,” which in turn points the reader to entries on the Great Wall, the Warring States period, several different dynasties, Gansu Province, the Korean peninsula, and Mao Zedong. Even entries dedicated to lesser (or less well-known) figures, such as the cosmological thinker Zou Yan (ca. 324–250 BCE), introduce the reader to a rich array of asterisked references to entries on Sima Qian, Confucius, Mencius, Laozi, Dong Zhongshu, Sunzi, and Deng Xiaoping. Along the way, the reader also encounters mentions of many defining characteristics of Chinese civilization, including Confucianism, Daoism, yin-yang theory, the correlation of the five elements with cosmic processes, and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), as well as graphics and tables that illustrate these characteristics.

Like any reference work, volumes in this series suffer from a lack of overall narrative that can guide readers strategically and comprehensively from point to point. That is the weakness of any such resource, as well as its strength: readers can direct themselves from entry to entry, following the paths outlined by cross-references and asterisks, and may end up in vastly different places depending upon their starting

points. It is clear that each volume is intended to be used in combination with the others in the series, which ought to help curious readers’ experiences of Chinese biography as history from becoming too narrow or shallow. The front matter found in volume 1 includes a political map of contemporary China with place names given in both *pinyin* (romanization) and *jiantizi* (simplified Chinese characters).

What looks like a valuable set of appendices, including guides to pronunciation, key terms in pinyin, and chronological periodization, is included only with the third volume, although a thirteen-page index of the entire series may be found at the end of each volume. (A future fourth volume will include the biographies of post-1979 Chinese figures.)

The large, widely spaced text of each entry makes it easy to read. The intended readership of this series appears to be high school and first- and second-year university students, although those who teach younger students can make good use of this resource, and older students and adults who lack a background in Chinese studies may benefit from the clear, concise information provided in the volume. Although nearly all students now learn to read Chinese in its simplified form (at least initially), it is unfortunate that the editors neglected to provide equivalents for simplified

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renderings in *fantizi* (traditional Chinese characters) as each Chinese term is introduced, especially in a volume that focuses exclusively on early China, when no simplified system was in place. However, these equivalents may be found in one of the appendices included in volume 3. Moreover, the readers most likely to make use of this resource probably will be less concerned with orthography and more interested in seeing how the 135 individuals profiled in the series fit into the mosaic of the world’s oldest continuous civilization. In that endeavor, the *Dictionary* triumphs by virtue of being the best English-language resource for novice students of Chinese cultural history with which I am familiar. It is a resource that all libraries and many teachers should make an effort to acquire. ■

#### NOTES

1. “Is Biography History?,” *OUPblog*, last modified February 10, 2011, <http://blog.oup.com/2011/02/biography>.
2. Kerry Brown, introduction to *The Berkshire Dictionary of Chinese Biography* (Great Barrington, MA: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2014), xxi-xxii, xxiv.

## Volume 2: Song Dynasty through the Ming Dynasty

Reviewed by James Anderson



JAMES ANDERSON is an Associate Professor at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. A historian of premodern China and Việt Nam, Anderson’s first book is *The Rebel Den of Nùng Trí Cao: Loyalty and Identity Along the Sino-Vietnamese Frontier* (University of Washington Press, 2007). Anderson is currently engaged in research for a new book on the southwestern Silk Road between China and northern Southeast Asia during the ninth through thirteenth centuries. Anderson is the coeditor, with Nola Cooke and Li Tana, of *The Tongking Gulf Through History* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011) and coeditor with John Whitmore of *China’s Encounters on the South and Southwest: Reforging the Fiery Frontier Over Two Millennia* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

The *Berkshire Dictionary of Chinese Biography* is the product of a superb effort by numerous scholars to create a reference work for students to learn more about significant figures in Chinese history from all walks of life. This compilation of biographical sketches, illuminated with well-researched and contextualized information about the lives and achievements of the men and women featured here, is an impressive accomplishment. All students of

Chinese history and scholars of China in general will benefit from consulting these detailed biographies.

My review focuses on volume 2 from this multivolume set, which includes the biographies of figures from the Song, Jin, Yuan, and Ming dynasties. This volume covers nearly 300 years of history, and its contributors have selected an array of historical personages to illustrate the great philosophical, technological, military,

and political trends of this extended period. The volume’s layout is clearly arranged, with a map and a detailed list of entries at the beginning of the book. Each entry contains helpful illustrations, as well as sidebar passages of poetry or prose for many of the literary figures. The large, easy-to-read text makes the volume relatively simple to skim for information. The volume has the appearance of a well-organized textbook, which suggests that the target audience would

be students ranging from high school and university students to possibly first-year graduate students. General readers would learn much from this work, but the volume of detailed information may be intimidating. Each section of the book describes a different dynasty and begins with a dynastic map and a short historical introduction, followed by the various biographies. Chinese characters in their simplified forms are included for most personal names, place names, and many important terms. I would also like to see the traditional characters included, but I realize that there are space limitations and editorial restrictions one must consider. Overall, this volume of the biographical dictionary is a valuable resource, in which newcomers to Song through Ming history can quickly access and absorb information regarding these pivotal figures from China's past.

The section of the volume on the Song dynasty is well-balanced, with individuals from military, political, and cultural circles all represented. The entry describing the early Song inventor of moveable type, Bi Sheng, is particularly effective. The authors describe his achievements, but also note that the full potential of Bi

Sheng's invention was not realized until centuries after his death. In this manner, readers are made aware of the delayed social impact of this important technological innovation, even when we can rightly note that Bi Sheng predated Johannes Gutenberg by nearly 500 years. The authors' sidebar on Cai Lun, the alleged inventor of paper, and Gutenberg is an effective evaluation of these two inventors' achievements in world historical terms. Other entries in this section vary in the amount of contextual information they present. Several biographies focus more narrowly on the individuals and their times. The biography for the female calligrapher and poet Li Qingzhao describes the life and achievements of a woman who excelled at literary pursuits, but the entry also tells of personal hardships she and her husband faced with the fall of the Northern Song court to the invading Jurchen. The biographies of the well-known scholars Su Shi, Sima Guang, and Wang Anshi collectively offer the reader an evenhanded depiction of the factional political struggles that plagued the late eleventh-century court of Shenzong and his immediate successors. I have a few minor quibbles, such as the lack of a biography

for Shen Kuo, an important figure in the history of Chinese science and technology. I am also not certain why the map at the beginning of this section does not feature the Dali kingdom near the southwest corner of the empire and why the Vietnamese kingdom is listed as "Annam," a term used in the Tang, and not "Jiaozhi" or "Đại Việt." However, these minor points aside, this section accomplishes the authors' aims by presenting a full and complex picture of Chinese society under the Northern and Southern Song courts.

The section on the Jin dynasty contains excellent entries for Genghis Khan, founder of the Mongol Empire, and the early Mongol conquerors of much of Eurasia. However, only one entry is devoted to a Jurchen political leader, the Jin founder Jin Taizu. There are strong reasons for providing readers with detailed biographies of these important Mongol leaders, but I think that more attention could be paid to other Jin subjects and their contributions to the region's history. One such figure is the ethnic Khitan Confucian scholar and adviser to Genghis Khan, Yelü Chucai, who allegedly saved the inhabitants of the North China Plain from annihilation by

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arguing to the Mongol leadership that taxing these communities would benefit the Mongols more in the long run than emptying the land of human settlement. The Yuan dynasty section is somewhat short but well-balanced, with figures from science, court life, literature, and the arts all included. The inclusion of the Uygur official and poet Guan Yunshi gives readers a better sense of the ethnic diversity among the Yuan elite.

The Ming dynasty is covered in the most substantial section of the volume, due perhaps to the greater abundance of biographical sources and, possibly, a stronger scholarly interest in these later events. The Ming biographies contain figures who lived in the period from the late Yuan through the earliest years of the Qing. One prominent Westerner is included, the Jesuit Matteo Ricci. As is the case in previous sections

of the book, individuals (although all male) from different sectors of Chinese society are included to paint a broader picture of the Ming world. The lives of individuals such as Ricci, the frontier leaders Altan Khan and Nurhaci, and conqueror of Taiwan Koxinga allow readers to see the many regional forces that shaped the Ming Empire's fate from beyond its borders. Several biographers in this section have also drawn connections between historical figures and their changing public images in modern-day Chinese society, offering readers a better sense of how history is produced and consumed in today's China.

In general, the writing in this volume is clear and concise. The careful use of scholarly primary and secondary sources by all its contributors gives strong support to the conclusions drawn

in the entries. The suggested readings listed at the end of each entry offer an interested reader a good launching pad for further exploration of these individuals and the times in which they lived. As educators, we know that many students, when confronted with a new research question, will turn first to online materials for guidance. As a test of this volume's usefulness in that context, I asked my fourteen-year-old niece to collect in ten minutes as much material as possible on one of the figures from this book. She returned with a stack of "hits" from Wikipedia and related sites, but none of these materials gave her a clear understanding of the society her figure inhabited and the larger significance of his life's work. Here, I believe, is where we find the true value for students: the careful scholarship conducted for this informative reference work. ■

## Volume 3: Qing Dynasty through the People's Republic of China (until 1979)

Reviewed by David Kenley



DAVID KENLEY is Professor of Chinese History and Director of Asian Studies at Elizabethtown College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. His teaching and research interests focus on Chinese intellectual history and overseas migration.

In volume 3 of the *Dictionary of Chinese Biography*, Berkshire Publishing has provided a helpful and fascinating reference work that can be used by teachers in various classrooms. Covering the period from 1644 to 1979, the volume sheds valuable light on China's modern era as seen through the lives of select individuals.

Kerry Brown, the editor-in-chief of the three-volume series, unapologetically argues for the value of biography in the study of history. "While historians subscribe less and less to the 'great men and women' trope of history," Brown admits, ". . . it does help to put history within the finite boundaries of major political figures like kings and queens and their reigns. This provides an easy starting point for further exploration."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, a cursory look at publishing figures reveals that biography remains a popular and influential form of history writing, and Berkshire is capitalizing on this public interest. Besides, as Brown reminds us, biography has been a uniquely Chinese form of history writing since the time of Sima Qian in the first century BCE. For all these reasons, he contends, biography is an excellent medium for studying China's past.

Like the previous two, volume 3 introduces the reader to some of the most fascinating figures of the modern era. It contains thirty-six biographies, averaging approximately 5,000 words each. They all follow a similar format, including a short bio-line and a summary of the entry, followed by an informative essay and a list of texts for further reading. The entries are written for a general audience and are appropriate for both secondary school students and college-level readers.

Volume 3 contains some ancillary items not found in the other two volumes. These include a pronunciation guide and pinyin/Wade-Giles conversion table; a list of prominent people beyond those in the dictionary; an index of kings, emperors, and rulers from throughout Chinese history; an index of geographical locations; a glossary; a timeline; and an index. Perhaps most helpful is the extensive bibliography containing other biographical resources and primary documents related to the dictionary's entries.

The contributing authors in this volume come from a wide range of backgrounds, including some of the most well-respected senior scholars in the field. Most have academic ap-

pointments, while others are independent scholars. They include researchers from the United States, Europe, and China. Together, they provide a highly credible interpretation of China's modern history.

Despite being written for a general readership, the entries represent the most recent scholarship. For example, Natascha Gentz provides an excellent historiography on public portrayals of Jiang Qing (Mao's wife and leader of the Cultural Revolution). "There are few neutral biographical sources about Jiang Qing," she contends, "[and] most are either apologetic or condemnatory, containing judgments about her progressive and visionary spirit or her evil and selfish nature."<sup>2</sup> She then goes on to provide an incisive review of these sources. Other entries are quite revisionist in their approach. Ezra F. Vogel, for instance, asserts that Deng Xiaoping—not Mao Zedong, Joseph Stalin, Winston Churchill, or Franklin D. Roosevelt—"had a greater long-term impact on world history than any other twentieth-century world leader."<sup>3</sup> There are numerous such entries that represent cutting-edge scholarship on the selected individuals.

As is the case in such a work, the process of selecting which individuals to include and which to exclude is somewhat arbitrary and inevitably leads to disagreement. Brown realizes this and in his introduction writes:

*The selection of figures is highly subjective, no matter what the overt criterion. The main objective in the end is to have a broadly representative selection of figures from the main periods in Chinese history. One could have endless arguments on whom to include and*