

BOOK REVIEWS

Twentieth Century China

A History in Documents

BY R. KEITH SCHOPPA

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Diverse voices from China's turbulent twentieth century call out from the pages of the valuable teaching resource *Twentieth Century China*. R. Keith Schoppa, author of several excellent monographs and textbooks on modern Chinese history, divides the history of the past hundred years into thirteen chronological chapters in this new work. For each, he provides a brief introduction followed by several relevant documents in a variety of forms: political manifestos, personal letters, travelers' reports, cartoons, photographs, etc. Most of the documents have already been published in English-language books, but Schoppa also provides some newly-translated material, as well as a timeline and recommendations for additional reading.

Other sourcebooks of material on Chinese history exist, including Patricia Ebrey's *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook* (second edition, Free Press, 1993) and Pei-kai Cheng and Michael Lestz's *The Search for Modern China: A Documentary Collection* (Norton, 1999). Schoppa's book differs from these in several ways. The time frame is restricted to the twentieth century, the material on the period between 1911 and 1949 is particularly rich, and graphical documents such as photos are included. I was surprised to find bibliographic information

for the documents hidden away in very small type at the back of the book. Also, the information listed regrettably did not include the original sources and dates for Chinese documents excerpted from other English-language publications.

Topics covered in the documents include major political events beginning with the Boxer uprising and aspects of social and cultural change, such as the growth of consumer culture and the women's movement. Except for some material on anti-Manchu sentiment in the early twentieth century and the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize speech by the Dalai Lama, there is little on ethnic and religious diversity. The violence and suffering that accompanied China's twentieth-century wars and revolutions is represented both graphically, such as in a photo of decapitated Boxers, and textually, as in descriptions of the Rape of Nanjing in 1937, and famine in the 1930s and 1960s.

Who will read this book and how? As part of the *Pages from History* series published by Oxford University Press, it seems intended for use as a stand-alone textbook in classes on modern Chinese history or for interested general readers. An editorial blurb on the back cover claims that the book "allows history to speak for itself and turns every reader into a historian." It seems to me, though, that to be understood, most of the documents require much more context than Schoppa is able to provide in his short comments on them. For example, there are two documents on the Falun Gong movement in chapter twelve. The first is an explanation by Falun Gong founder Li Hongzhi of the nature of the practice. The terms in it are not likely to be understood by those with no background in Buddhist thought, a topic treated nowhere else in the text. The second is an excerpt from a 1999 *Beijing Review* article, labeled anti-sect propaganda by Schoppa, describing how Falun Gong makes people who follow it harm themselves. What are readers to make of these tales of people disemboweling themselves and jumping off buildings? Because Schoppa's introduction does not touch on the crisis in the public health system and other possible explanations for the popularity of Falun Gong, the combined effect of the two excerpts seems likely to reinforce simplistic views of China as a place of bizarre practices with an oppressive, menacing government. A good companion textbook or background lectures by an instructor are in my view required for the voice of history to express itself clearly in these excerpts.

Teachers will find this book most useful as a source for their own lectures, to illustrate the historical events and processes they are discussing with images and comments by the participants. Students can be asked to write papers based on some of the documents, but many of them are so short that this may be difficult to do well. I like the longer documents in Ebrey's sourcebook for this reason. Schoppa's book, however, is beautifully designed and brings together a wealth of interesting material. ■

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