

BACKGROUND BOOKS

The field of contemporary China studies has never been short on punditry, but recent years have witnessed an outpouring of essays and books on the current Chinese condition. The Beijing massacre of 1989 alone produced over 30 books on the 50 days that shook the world. Most of the growing Tiananmen bookshelf consists either of descriptive accounts by foreign eyewitnesses or of emotional autobiographies by Chinese dissidents now exiled abroad. The best analysis of the origins and events of 1989 is probably Tony Saich's edited **The Chinese People's Movement: Perspectives on Spring 1989** (M. E. Sharpe, 1990).

Many recent books on China are more scholarly in nature, and a fair number of these are products of a decade of research on the mainland. New data always recasts conventional wisdom, and the flood of new materials emanating from the People's Republic in recent years has done much to refine and revise our knowledge of the Mao years. This is most clearly evident in Volumes 14 and 15 of **The Cambridge History of China**, edited by Harvard's Roderick MacFarquhar and the late John King Fairbank. In more than 1,800 pages, covering the period 1949-1982, one learns of repeated shifts in government policy, the untold human suffering wrought by utopian ideologists (not the least of whom was the Great Helmsman himself) and vindictive citizens, the schemings of Machiavellian elites, a society struggling for dignity and meaningful life amid repression, and the pressures of national security.

Fairbank, the doyen of American Sinology, also left a lasting intellectual testament in **China: A New History** (Harvard Univ. Press, 1992). While not principally concerned with contemporary China, his effortless travels through millennia of imperial Chinese history challenge orthodox historiography on several fronts and remind one of enduring themes in

China's long history. The same can be said for Jonathan Spence's **Chinese Roundabout: Essays in History and Culture** (W. W. Norton, 1992), a collection of the Yale historian's observations on several centuries of interaction between East and West in China. "Westerners," Spence writes, "have been unclear about China since they first began to live there in any numbers and write about the country at length. The history of our confusion goes back more than 400 years."

Another valuable account placing China's current dilemmas in historical context is W. J. F. Jenner's **The Tyranny of History: The Roots of China's Crisis** (Penguin, 1992). Focusing on the use and misuse of historiography in China, Jenner comes to a discouraging conclusion: The weight of China's authoritarian past is too heavy a burden for the contemporary society to escape.

Brantly Womack's (ed.) **Contemporary Chinese Politics in Historical Perspective** (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991) places Deng's reforms in historical perspective, showing how fundamental Deng's departures have been in relation to China's century-long quest for modernity. Individual chapters examine the erosion of public authority and the growth of a nascent civil society; new channels of political participation at the rice-roots; problems associated with the dismantling of the Stalinist industrial structure; the rise of technocratic elites; and the evolving renegotiation of the social contract between a post-totalitarian state and society.

Anyone wishing to refresh his memory about the atrocities and machinations of the Maoist period can consult three recent sagas. Jung Chang's **Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China** (HarperCollins, 1992) may well be the most important autobiography to issue from the pen of a Chinese since the country

opened up 20 years ago. Jung Chang's is an elegantly written and passionately described account of three generations of women in modern China. Here, for example, she recalls thoughts she had as a young instructor of English at Sichuan University shortly before going to England on a scholarship: "The Silk River meandered past the campus, and I often wandered along its banks on my last evenings. Its surface glimmered in the moonlight and the hazy mist of the summer night. I contemplated my 26 years. I had experienced privilege as well as denunciation, courage as well as fear, seen kindness and loyalty as well as the depths of human ugliness. Amid suffering, ruin, and death, I had above all known love and the indestructible human capacity to survive and pursue happiness."

In its own way, John Byron and Robert Pack's *The Claws of the Dragon* (Simon & Schuster, 1992) also exposes the world of Chinese power and privilege under communism. Theirs is the account of the evil Kang Sheng, China's Beria. Kang Sheng was for many years Mao's henchman and was the father of communist China's security services. Rich in detail, Byron (a pseudonym) and Peck expose the shady underworld of the communist elite and their intramural persecutions.

If the picture is not made adequately clear in *Claws of the Dragon*, it certainly is in Harrison Salisbury's *The New Emperors: China in the Era of Mao and Deng* (Little, Brown, 1992). For years China-watchers have sought to understand the inner workings of and the relationships among the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) elite. In one volume veteran foreign correspondent Salisbury has provided more juicy tidbits about this subject than any other book that has emerged during 70 years of CCP machinations (including the Red Guard materials of the 1960s). Salisbury's highly readable account is derived from extensive interviews with high-ranking colleagues of Mao and Deng, but readers should be wary of Salisbury's data, much of which is presented without adequate verification or footnoting.

In recent years, scholars have paid considerable attention to the redefinition of state-society relations in the People's Republic. A collection of essays by leading American China scholars in Arthur Lewis Rosenbaum's edited *State and Society in China: The Consequences of Reform* (Westview, 1992) examines the nexus in varying social sectors. The withdrawal of the state and increased social autonomy has been argued by many, but this view is provocatively countered by Cornell University political scientist Vivienne Shue. Her brief but important book, *The Reach of the State: Sketches of the Chinese Body Politic* (Stanford Univ. Press, 1988), argues that during the Maoist era the state's power was never as pervasive in rural areas as many had assumed. At the same time, she finds, post-Mao reforms strengthened certain aspects of state power, particularly in areas such as grain procurement, while weakening the state's hand in such matters as birth control and tax collection.

Similar complexities are explored in two superb accounts of rural life and politics under the reforms: Jean C. Oi's *State and Peasant in Contemporary China* (Univ. of Calif. Press, 1989), and Daniel Kelliher's *Peasant Power in China: The Era of Rural Reform, 1979-89* (Yale Univ. Press, 1992). Oi studies the division of the harvest and employs a patron-client model to explain the relationships of authority in the Chinese countryside. Kelliher's contribution reveals the degree to which peasants set the state's agenda, rather than vice versa. Both of these studies should be required reading for people trying to understand the changes that have affected 800 million Chinese peasants.

These volumes on rural life and politics generally paint a picture of stubborn localism, where the Leninist party-state barely exists. One gets a different picture from Kevin O'Brien's *Reform Without Liberalization* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990) and Barrett L. McCormick's *Political Reform in Post-Mao China* (Univ. of Calif. Press, 1990). Both

books portray a political system in which Leninist norms and institutions remain primary, despite their eroding efficacy under Deng's reforms. O'Brien finds that, while enlivened, China's parliament remains coopted by the CCP, while McCormick argues that patronage and corruption (both of which have risen markedly under the reform program) are integral aspects of Leninist rulership. Leninist parties typically penetrate their societies and set up webs of organizational dependency.

Two other recent books on Chinese politics offer a more variegated picture of political change in China. In **From Revolutionary Cadres to Party Technocrats in Socialist China** (Univ. of Calif. Press, 1991), Berkeley political scientist Hong Yung Lee portrays a new bureaucratic elite increasingly technocratic and competent. The contributors to Kenneth G. Lieberthal's and David M. Lampton's edited volume **Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China** (Univ. of Calif. Press, 1992) develop the thesis of "fragmented authoritarianism" to describe a bureaucratic system characterized by bargaining, competition, and compartmentalism. The bargaining perspective is useful, and the authors' emphasis on bureaucracy is a good reminder of the enduring importance of state institutions in an

increasingly market-driven society.

What will post-Deng China look like? What variables will shape the passage to the post-Deng era? While it is impossible to answer the former question, three recent studies shed considerable light on the latter: the Asia Society's annual **China Briefing**, 1992, edited by William A. Joseph (Westview, 1993); Steven M. Goldstein's **China at the Crossroads: Reform after Tiananmen** (Foreign Policy Assoc. Headline Series, 1992); and **China in the Nineties: Crisis Management and Beyond**, edited by David S. G. Goodman and Gerald Segal (Oxford Univ. Press, 1991). All three focus on the present and sketch the limits of change and principal trends in China today. "After Deng's death . . .," writes Goldstein, "the new leadership will undoubtedly come under increased political pressure from both conservatives who would like to restrict ties with the outside world as well as regional forces seeking broadened ties. Although the initial instincts of Deng's successors are likely to be inclined toward a continuation of Deng's economic policies and thus a more accommodating posture toward the United States as major economic support of China's reform effort, there are numerous factors that might move policy in a much different direction."

—David Shambaugh

David Shambaugh, formerly director of the Asia Program at the Woodrow Wilson Center, teaches Chinese politics at the University of London and is the editor of the China Quarterly. His most recent book is Beautiful Imperialist: China Perceives America, 1972–1990 (Princeton Univ. Press, 1991).