



Makers of Modern Asia

Ramachandra Guha (Editor) , Jay Taylor (Contributor) , Rana Mitter (Contributor) , Odd Arne Westad (Contributor) , Srinath Raghavan (Contributor) , Farzana Shaikh (Contributor) , James Rush (Contributor) , Michael D. Barr (Contributor) , more... Jen Chian (Contributor) , Sophie Quinn-Judge (Contributor) ...less

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Hardly more than a decade old, the twenty-first century has already been dubbed the Asian Century in recognition of China and India's increasing importance in world affairs. Yet discussions of Asia seem fixated on economic indicators--gross national product, per capita income, share of global trade. *Makers of Modern Asia* reorients our understanding of contemporary Asia by highlighting the political leaders, not billionaire businessmen, who helped launch the Asian Century.

The nationalists who crafted modern Asia were as much thinkers as activists, men and women who theorized and organized anticolonial movements, strategized and directed military campaigns, and designed and implemented political systems. The eleven thinker-politicians whose portraits are presented here were a mix of communists, capitalists, liberals, authoritarians, and proto-theocrats--a group as diverse as the countries they represent.

From China, the world's most populous country, come four: Mao Zedong, leader of the Communist Revolution; Zhou Enlai, his close confidant; Deng Xiaoping, purged by Mao but rehabilitated to play a critical role in Chinese politics in later years; and Chiang Kai-shek, whose Kuomintang party formed the basis of modern Taiwan. From India, the world's largest democracy, come three: Mohandas Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Indira Gandhi, all of whom played crucial roles in guiding India toward independence and prosperity. Other exemplary nationalists include Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh, Indonesia's Sukarno, Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew, and Pakistan's Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. With contributions from leading scholars, *Makers of Modern Asia* illuminates the intellectual and ideological foundations of Asia's spectacular rise to global prominence.

Makers of Modern Asia Details

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From Reader Review Makers of Modern Asia for online ebook

Liam says

"The tragedy of Ho Chi Minh was that his efforts to make peace with France came to be viewed by his own party as mistakes. In the end he was forced to seek alliances with China and the Soviet Union that in many ways curtailed Vietnam's independence." (91)

"Ever since the Rectification movement, Zhou had adopted the tactic of making repeated self-criticism until Mao let him go. But this time, he refused to accept the accusation that he was a 'Chinese traitor' ... Instead of accusing Zhou as a 'Chinese traitor,' Deng pointed out that the essence of Zhou's problem lay in that 'Your position is just one step away from Chairman. To others, the Chairmanship is within sight but out of reach. To you, however, it is within sight and within reach.' After Deng's presentation, Zhou began making 'self-criticism.' On December 9, Zhou was asked to accompany Mao to meet the King of Nepal who was visiting China. To everyone's surprise, Mao 'warmly shook hands' with Zhou, saying that 'the premier remains the premier.'" (168)

Amit Udata says

The book scores high on content but very poor on readability. I cannot help, but be reminded of the way most of the team projects are completed in college - each person in the team takes up a part of the assignment and the final output is just a disjointed collection of individual effort! The book has no overarching theme, and even within a chapter, the element of chronology is largely missing which makes it difficult to keep track of the life events of the leaders.

SL says

Makers of Modern Asia (Harvard University Press) edited by Ramchandra Guha is a collection of 11 essays that aims to provide a socio-historical context to Asia's economic advancement. "The essential thesis of the book is that in this fascination, obsession and enchantment with the economic growth of specific Asian countries, we have forgotten the political preconditions of that economic growth," says Guha.

Through each of its essays, the volume draws a portrait of nationalists who helped craft their respective political systems, which in turn provided a fillip to their economic struggle. Listed in the book are outstanding exemplars of 19th and 20th century political change in Asia.

The book includes Chinese stalwarts like Mao Zedong, leader of the Communist Revolution, Zhou Enlai, his close ally and confidant, Deng Xiaoping, who was purged by Mao and went on to reshape Chinese economic history with his revisionist policies and Chiang Kai-shek, whose Kuomintang party formed the basis of modern Taiwan. Other portraits come from India and cover Mohandas Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Indira Gandhi, all of whom played crucial roles in guiding India toward independence. Then there are essays about Vietnam nationalist Ho Chi Minh, Indonesia's Sukarno, Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew and Pakistan's Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

The book in its entirety helps the reader understand the rise of Asia by offering an insight into its history and political lives — the anticolonial revolutions, the process of consolidation, the sustainable political systems envisaged, their economic strategies and the attitude of the post-colonial state and its leaders to traditional beliefs which provided a backdrop to the economic growth we have seen over the last 30 or 40 years.

<https://svetlanalasrado.wordpress.com...>

Hadrian says

Series of eleven biographical essays on major figures in the history of modern Asia. Treads lightly with the themes of nationalism, anti-colonialism, choice of political institutions, economic strategy, foreign policy, and the interplay between post-colonialism and tradition. Helped me think critically about figures I was already aware of, and introduced me to ones I was less familiar with.

In order:

Mahatma Gandhi

Chiang Kai-Shek

Ho Chi Minh

Mao Zedong

Jawaharlal Nehru

Zhou Enlai

Sukarno

Deng Xiaoping

Indira Gandhi

Lee Kuan Yew

Zulfakir Ali Bhutto (Not Jinnah, interestingly enough.)

Revanth Ukkalam says

It is a short introduction to understanding the shape of Asia as it is today. The one major area this book surely succeeds in exploring is the foreign relations of major Asian emerging and advanced powers. Above all it is a brilliant initiative in bringing together experts on different personalities and countries making it one that covers a fairly wide ground.

Arvind says

Unlike Makers of Modern India which was also edited by Rama Guha, this book reads like Wikipedia pages of the 11 politicians featured. Mini-biographies with little or no attempt to get into their thought-process. And ironically, it is difficult to appreciate the politicians from these essays if u have no prior knowledge of their nation and history.

In particular, the essays on Ho Chi Minh and Sukarno were unbearably dry.

Multis says

11 essays with 11 different authors makes it quite unorthodox in its genre

1 Gandhi - He was by no means a person who made Modern India. Any other leader would have been appropriate but then again Guha has yet to see beyond Gandhi-Nehru family. On one occasion he tries to assimilate Gandhi's thoughts into Christianity.

2 Chiang Kai-shek - This reads more like a wiki article. Difficult to get into unless you have previous knowledge

3 Ho Chi Minh - Very clumsy writing, dry and all over the place. Makes no effort to understand his thought process. Definitely the worst in this books.

4 Mao Zedong - The writer writes under the impression that the reader is already aware of Chinese words. Makes no effort to educate on "The Great Leap" and "The Cultural Revolution". There is also a subtle push to show Christianity and Western education in positive light while undermining the native culture. Very disappointed

5 Jawaharlal Nehru - Brief and to the point. Balances itself with some criticism sprinkled at the end. Makes a small mention of the disastrous handling of Kashmir. Blames K. Kamaraj for dynasty politics. At the end, has a small reference from Bible to keep the agenda intact. Overall I would say, good but a bit biased.

6 Zhou Enlai - This one was entertaining than the Chiang essay. Has a great flow and simple language. Heavy emphasis on his foreign policy.

7 Sukarno - Starts off well but gets distracted midway with other parties and stuff in Indonesia. Dry and bore read.

8 Deng Xiaoping - Out of all the essays I found this to be the best. Short, simple language, great flow, analysis of economic and foreign policies.

9 Indira Gandhi - Well balanced and busts the myth of her contribution to Green Revolution. Though I feel there was too much focus on Emergency. Her ties with Hindu God-Man and Economic blunder are not mentioned. She inserted Socialist and Secular in the Constitution in the Emergency period yet this biggest crime of her is dropped. Very biased essay and whitewashes many of her long lasting damages to the Democratic Institutions.

10 Lee Kuan Yew - The author leaves no stone unturned in bashing him. Probably because of Lee's anti-Islam and anti-Christian views. If you want to read how Lee transformed Singapore from Third world to First, this isn't the place to look for. Besides branding him racist, the author uses half truths to malign his image.

11 Zulfikar Ali Bhutto - Short, touches over the surface and does not go in deeper. Ahmadiyya make only one line

Apurv Kashyap says

A narrative nightmare

Though one cannot deny the value of anthologies, fictional or non fictional, there is some degree of consistency in them. It may refer to its narrative flow, its use of imagery or just the context and connectedness of the prose.

Makers of Modern Asia on the other hand, does not strive to achieve these aspects. It may be said that it has embodied the spirit of the very subject it addresses: Asia.

Informative and subjective, it tries to explain through often disjointed prose the very nature of the society within which a massive chunk of human population lives. And like this society, it is diverse, distinct and often at odds with itself.

However, it's a good read for someone who has not had the opportunity to assess their geopolitical environment and its key players in an academic light. It moves beyond the hearsay of local opinion and dices deep into the subject matter (however inconsistently it may be) and delivers something of a fair understanding for the average reader.

Read it but do not expect much and you will be satisfied. Much like a modern film that has been mass-produced in Asia. An apt analogy if I must say.

Vasundhara Vats says

The book is a very interesting read on the political leaders who gave birth to modern day post-colonialist Asian countries. The backgrounds, political ideologies, personal beliefs and career trajectory of these leaders gives you a sense of why Asia is the way it is now. I especially enjoyed reading especially about the Chinese leaders and getting a sense of history on the country.

The only drawback of the book is its quite extensive and sometimes the essays follow no logical path. So, it takes some effort on the reader's side to be engaged in the book. But totally worth the political knowledge one gains reaching the last page. Highly recommended for people interested in political history.

Ayaan says

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Sumit Singh says

11 essays are written by 11 different authors, which sometimes makes it difficult to grasp the flow.

Essay on Gandhi was unnecessary (he didn't make modern India, but died much before that, probably essay on Ambedkar or Vajpayee would have made much more sense)

Essay on Zia ul Haq should be there instead of Bhutto (Haq did more to bring Pakistan to international level during Soviet invasion of Afghanistan)

Author was somewhat confused (or didn't want to take a stand) while writing about Indira Gandhi (majorly talked about emergency period)

On the contrary Guha is a hardcore congress supporter and so does his writing suggest

Essays on all 4 Chinese (though short) are flawless

Other essays just touch the surface and don't go deeper

Overall 3 star

Yogya Hari Prakash Burra says

A decent book. Some of these short biographies were well written and enjoyable like the one on Nehru but some others like the one on Lee Kuan Yew seemed a little biased. These essays are better if you know a lot about the leader before reading this book. This book removes some misconceptions and gives an alternate view rather than a short, first time read. Maybe that was the reason why I enjoyed the Indian leaders' chapters much more than the others as I was familiar with them.

Vishaka Datta says

The Ramachandra Guha edited "Makers of Modern Asia" opens with the purpose of putting "politics before economics" in analyzing the miracle economies of Asia today - India, Taiwan, China, Vietnam, Singapore and Indonesia. By looking into some of the most influential leaders that have shaped the polity of these nations, I'd say the book largely achieves its stated goal. A highlight of the book is the connections between the chapters that allow one to compare anti-colonial movements across these countries rather nicely.

Some remarkable similarities do emerge between these leaders. They were all remarkably well-travelled, with their formative years spent in the West. All the leaders encountered communism at some point or the other in these years, with reactions to them varying with the readily embracing its ideals (Mao and Ho Chi

Minh) to a more steady distancing (Lee Kuan Yew, Nehru), while some tried to find a ready compromise with nationalistic sentiments (Deng Xiaopeng, Sukarno). They all wrote extensively, aside from being in and out of prison. And most of all, they drew inspiration from each other. In today's world, where nationalists look inwards for inspiration and ideas to take their countries forward, these leaders would surely have been viewed as subversive :)

All in all, a great read :)

Sandeepan Mondal says

A modern history of the Asian continent (primarily south Asia and south east Asia; I am sure most of us have trouble categorizing the Asian countries in these two blocs!) would be too lengthy and tiresome for the reader to go through in addition to it not addressing the subtle motives and psychologies at play behind the greatest tremors that shook these countries and paved their future course, for better or for worse. "Makers of Modern Asia" solves this dilemma of sorts to some extent - it showcases the political/economic development not only through the eyes of the prima donnas but also assesses the impact and legacy which they left behind quite objectively. The nearly 600 pages explore the development of China, India, Vietnam, Pakistan, Singapore and Indonesia in the post-colonial period, when these nations were at cross-roads and needed more than just political will and leadership to push ahead. The authors, through brief biographical sketches of the tallest leaders in these respective nations, take the reader through political upheavals, culture shocks and sinusoidal curves in their economic and social life.

To the inquisitive scholar or the curious reader, the 'impact' of Gandhi, the 'ambition and determination' of Chiang Kai-shek, the 'nationalism and persistence' of Ho Chi Minh, the 'charisma and terror' of Mao Zedong, the 'political romance' of Nehru, the 'humility and diplomacy' of Zhou Enlai, the 'vision' of Sukarno, the 'ruthlessness and single-mindedness' of Deng Xiaoping, the 'audacity and fallacy' of Indira Gandhi, the 'authority and impatience' in Lee Kuan Yew and the 'arrogance and nationalism' of Z.A. Bhutto - expose human frailties and strengths that these leaders carried to the fore of their personalities and in this process unleashed the neo-age national characters but without completely discarding the vestiges of a gone era.

These brief essays, although are not a fast read and it sometimes appears that a little knowledge of these nations in the post-independence era would warrant less reading effort, nonetheless the writing style is lucid and legible for most of the parts. I found the parts concerning 'Chiang Kai-shek' to be too concentrated on the economic aspects of China while the 'Ho Chi Minh' essay was tedious and not a very interesting read (and you can blame that on my possessing almost nil knowledge about Ho Chi Minh or of Vietnam's post-colonial history!).

In hindsight, the vision of some of the leaders becomes quite clear and we can make sense out of the political steps that they had taken. Mao Zedong's fiasco with "The Great Leap Forward" in China and Lee Kuan Yew's success with the authoritarian regime in Singapore are case studies in glaring contrast. But at the same time, we need to consider that other factors like diversity in population, prevailing cultural and social beliefs as well as the clash between 'tried and tested methods' and 'experimental learning' did play their parts in determining the future trajectory of success or failure.

If you need to have a quick read about these tall personalities condensed in one unassuming book, then this is an appealing grab. You won't be disappointed!

Gaurav Shah says

It's an interesting documentation of the lives of 11 leaders who have played a pivotal role in shaping Asia. Quality of writing differs across different chapters since they are written by different people. Also the book would better serve people who are aware of the context of those countries and personalities... Otherwise it could be difficult to connect with the narrative at times
