

The Rise of Modern China

Immanuel C.Y. Hsu

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Now in its sixth edition, this book has been updated to examine the return of Hong Kong in 1997 and the upcoming return of Macao in 1999. Hsu discusses the end of the last vestiges of foreign imperialism in China, as well as China's emergence as a regional and global superpower. U.S.-China rivalry and the prospect of unification between China and Taiwan are also considered.

The Rise of Modern China Details


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RJ says

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Alcibiades says

Although focusing on political and social history more than "The Search for Modern China", it's much more detailed and comprehensive than other accounts.

Kleon Chan says

For the moment I think that this book has a very good balanced views, the writer tries to not be biased and takes us into a very good history of modern china starting from 1600-2000

Alex Choo says

This is a huge book. I read the Chinese version, and it still took me more than 3 weeks to finish. If I read this English version I would have to spend 3 months or more...

I was once proud of my country, China. But I'm growingly not sure. What kind of country allows its people to suffer from dictators and suppression, for thousands of years? Ummm, a psychopath one?

pinenutsandrice says

The bane of junior-college history students, circa 1990s.

Dave says

Comprehensive history of China from the fall of the Ming Dynasty through the People's Republic of China's acceptance as a member of the United Nations in the 1970's. Well written and thoroughly documented; extensive footnotes.

Paul Hart says

The decisive overview of the past 200 years of Chinese history. Unlike Jonathan Spence's Search for Modern China, Hsu excellent gears his text towards students in clearly understandable sections linked to political, social and economic factors.

Kevin Bell says

Hsu's dense work is not what I would call fun reading, but he is very thorough. The subject matter is fascinating and he deals with it maturely. His treatment of China is authoritative, and if you want a starting point for further sinological studies, this is a good one.

Brian Jung says

Significant article about modern Chinese history in English. Fairbank's book is about pre-modern China and his book is about modern. If you want to know whole the history about China, history and the future, Hsu and Fairbank's books are mostly recommended.

Kay Howe Lee says

I honestly regret not finishing this before I took my IB exams back in 2014. The amount of detail, supported by clear context and reasoned argument has proved highly interesting and doubtlessly would have earned me more than a few brownie points in my scripts.

Mao says

This book covers from 1600 to 1990s. I like that it strikes to present a balanced and objective views of major events and changes in the history. I like to read about the details of history events and the reason and causes(including economics and culture) of them, which I didn't know when I learned history.

Mkp says

Fascinating account of the Opium War and the mid-19th century political turmoil. Another interesting segment concerns the late 19th Century Reform movement. The Wade-Giles encoding of Chinese names is a drawback, and I find all the apostrophes in the names difficult to work with. On the positive side, though, the index is quite complete and valuable (although there are some omissions that I have noticed).

However Hsu's view of Mao (which amounts almost to hagiography) starkly contrasts with the work of Chang and Halliday ("Mao: the Unknown Story"). One needs to find some bridge between these two works.

Perhaps it is best to read Hsu first (I did the reverse) and then read C&H for a modifying update. Certainly Hsu tends to drastically underplay the disastrous impacts of certain events on the Chinese people, including the Taiping Rebellion, the Japanese depredations, the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution. He is more interested in the political machinations, rather than the social and cultural impacts.

But even in the political machinations, there are questions. For example he says that Stalin was always against Mao, where C&H claim that Mao was Stalin's favorite and that Stalin essentially made Mao.

Also, Hsu endorses the idea that humiliation and losing face is the greatest tragedy suffered by the Chinese people. It was worth any sacrifice, including mass extinctions, in order to return the insults on the arrogant parties that would dare to disrespect the Chinese. Here is a typical statement: "Like all patriotic Chinese, Mao had always wanted to rectify the injuries China had suffered in the past" (page 682).

It's interesting that Hsu claims that Krushchev planned to bomb the Chinese nuclear bomb facilities in 1964 just prior to the first successful Chinese detonation of a nuclear weapon. He was removed from the leadership by Brezhnev and Kosygin for this. But Mao's megalomania drove Brezhnev (or at least military figures under his leadership), just five years later, to propose to the US that Russia destroy China's nuclear capability (with the US colluding or, at least, standing aside during this act). But Nixon angrily rejected this plan.

Further to the issue of humiliation and losing face, Hsu misrepresents the visit of Nixon to China in 1972, particularly the political ramifications of it. His main focus is on the extent to which the Americans humbled themselves, thereby providing the Chinese with valuable pride inflation. Along similar lines, Hsu justifies the costly and pointless Chinese invasion of Viet Nam in 1978 as necessary from the point of view of Chinese pride requirements (for having been insulted by the earlier Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia).

Overall, this is an important book and essential reading.

Marios Antoniou says

One of the most influential books on modern China. Easily understandable, engaging and balanced!

Randall Harrison says

Read this book for an undergraduate class at the University of Oklahoma in the Spring of 1982. One of two course I took from Professor Sidney Brown.
