

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

China and the West: China's Response to the West

Review Author: Roberto Paterno

Philippine Studies vol. 12, no. 3 (1964): 559–562

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>
Fri June 30 13:30:20 2008

munist-bloc moves elsewhere. With the full-scale commitment of Chinese Communist "volunteer" troops in the Korean war against U.S. and U.N. forces, additional reasons for support of the Nationalist government and the people of Taiwan against Communist attack developed. This neutralization of the strait of Formosa, fourteen years old now, has kept free from Communist oppression and out of the Red orbit a population of 11,000,000, as large as Hungary's, and equally precious in human dignity.

America's policy regarding China, Tang Tsou holds, was vitiated at least from 1941 to 1950 by an imbalance between ends and means. The flaw took two forms; one was "an unwillingness, and, at times, an inability to use military power purposefully to achieve political objectives." The other was "an unwillingness and inability to abandon unattainable goals in order to avoid entanglement in a hopeless cause."

There was not enough intelligent subordination of military to political aims regarding China in the way the U.S. waged its war against Japan, granted. But to my mind there is no proof that direct, armed U.S. intervention in the Chinese civil war was morally justified, or that it would surely have achieved goods proportionate to its cost in many values.

And high goals which for a time are unattainable are not to be abandoned lightly, nor are causes apparently hopeless always so to the great-hearted and enterprising. The vision of a re-united China great, free, democratic, and friendly in the family of nations offers a goal to be worked for by every discoverable good means; it is a cause that all who want peace, growing prosperity, and full human dignity in the Orient and the 21st-century world should never regard as hopeless. It is worthy, rather, of efforts positive and persevering, no matter how long and laborious they must be.

The present book is the second major work of Tang Tsou; it is to be hoped that he will continue to contribute to the cause we have just mentioned his fine scientific and human talents.

CHARLES J. MCCARTHY

CHINA AND THE WEST

CHINA'S RESPONSE TO THE WEST: A DOCUMENTARY SURVEY 1839-1923. By Ssu-yü Teng and John K. Fairbank, with E-tu Zen Sun, Chaoying Fang and others. New York: Atheneum Paperbacks 44, 1963. xi, 296 pp.

China's Response to the West by Professors Teng and Fairbank is a book familiar to most students of modern Chinese history. It was originally published ten years ago in 1954 by Harvard University Press. Reprinted in 1961 with several factual errors corrected, it is still available in this hardbound form from the original publishers. Now, however, a new paperback pocketbook-sized reprint published by Atheneum by arrangement with Harvard University Press makes the same work available at a substantially reduced price.

Present cold war realities lend a certain urgency to the need for a better understanding of the forces that have shaped the China of today. Communist China is beyond the scope of this book which deals with the period from 1839 to 1923. Nevertheless, the China of Mao Tse-tung cannot be understood apart from the great pressures, changes, and revolutions that have affected various facets of "traditional" China in the last hundred years or so. Although these pressures, changes, and revolutions were no doubt partly the result of an internal process of decay and growth within Chinese society itself, they are unintelligible apart from the context of Western contact. *China's Response to the West* is a valuable contribution to our understanding of this context.

China was the proud possessor of a highly sophisticated culture and state system developed and enriched through about three thousand years of continuous recorded history and tradition. The invasion of this ancient society by the modern West with superior arms and with radically different ideas and institutions was certainly one of the most momentous events of this age.

As merchants and others from expanding Western nations appeared in increasing numbers on the South China coast in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the rulers of China tried to assimilate them into the traditional system of tributary relations which took for granted the central position of the Chinese throne and Chinese civilization in relation to "outside barbarians." For some time, this system was prolonged through the quarantine of the foreigners at Macao and Canton. An accumulation of problems, particularly with the British at Canton, over such questions as opium smuggling, greater freedom of trade and contact, diplomatic equality, and legal jurisdiction, finally exploded in the so-called Opium War. The resulting Anglo-Chinese treaty of Nanking in 1842 inaugurated a century of Sino-Western international relations characterized by the famous "unequal treaties" forced upon China by the Western powers.

During this time, a reluctant China was pushed into closer and closer contact with the then expanding and more powerful West. Propelled by the industrial revolution, international rivalries, and revived missionary zeal, this Western contact unleashed forces which eventually clashed with the old order at many points from its superstructure down

to its very foundations. In the words of Professors Teng and Fairbank (p. 1):

The massive structure of traditional China was torn apart much as the earth's crust would be disrupted by a comet passing too near. In the end, the remnants of the old China—its dress and manners, its classical written language and intricate system of imperial government, its reliance upon the extended family, the Confucian ethic, and all the other institutional achievements and cultural ornaments of a glorious past—had to be thrown into the melting pot and refashioned. The old order was changed within the space of three generations.

The book under review is a survey of how important leaders of China, faced with the aggressive impact of the modern West, tried to understand an alien civilization, to preserve, revitalize, or refashion their heritage, and to create a China capable of dealing with the West on equal terms. The survey begins in 1839, when Commissioner Lin Tse-hsü tried to solve the opium problem by blockading the British merchants at Canton, destroying their opium stocks, and addressing his famous moralistic letter of advice and remonstrance to the ruler of England. It ends in 1923, when Sun Yat-sen, after having helped overthrow the Manchu dynasty and the imperial system itself only to see the republican revolution degenerate into political chaos and warlordism, finally adopted some of the methods of the Russian Communists to reorganize and strengthen his revolutionary party. Thus, the book covers the three generations from the first arrival of the modern West in force to the beginning of the influence of Marxism-Leninism in Chinese thought and Chinese affairs.

The survey consists essentially of English translations of sixty-five selected Chinese documents—mostly memorials, letters, excerpts from diaries, essays, manifestoes, and the like—each of which is introduced or followed by explanatory passages placing the documents in their proper historical context, furnishing biographical data on the personages involved, and describing the trends and movements illustrated. In addition to these sixty-five documents, the authors in their commentaries make extensive use of numerous other quotations thus allowing the Chinese protagonists to speak for themselves as much as possible. Selections are included from the writings, for instance, of the nineteenth century provincial viceroys such as Tseng Kuo-fan, Li Hung-chang, and Chang Chih-tung, the new breed of "specialists" in foreign matters such as Feng Kuei-fen, Wang T'ao, and Hsueh Fu-ch'eng, the 1898 reformers led by K'ang Yu-wei, the revolutionary leader Sun Yat-sen, the influential polemicist Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, and the leaders of the intellectual ferment associated with the May Fourth Movement such as Ch'en Tu-hsiu and Hu Shih.

Through the authors' skillful interplay of translation and commentary, the book provides a well-organized survey of the changes and

lines of action proposed and undertaken by different persons and groups to cope with the new problems caused or occasioned by the impact of the West. The reader is able to trace some of the stages by which Chinese appreciation of the West gained in depth and breadth. For a long time, it was only or mainly the military power of the West that impressed the Chinese leaders who thought about the problem. The desire to acquire the secrets of this power in order to "control the barbarians" and defend China led from an appreciation of the superiority of Western ships and guns to a realization of the need for the machinery, the technological skills, the science and other Western studies necessary for their manufacture and handling, for industry and communications to develop wealth and strength, and for the adoption of other innovations to meet new problems. The process of adjustment was slow and fraught with difficulties and barriers. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, these efforts at "self-strengthening" had been clearly inadequate. Increased contact and a continuing series of failures and humiliations at the hands not only of the Western powers but also of a rapidly modernizing Japan, hastened the birth of great movements for institutional reform, political revolution, and reassessment of ideologies and value systems.

The survey covers a great deal of ground and it is inevitable that in some places its analysis of men and their ideas should be somewhat superficial and oversimplified. Except for the factual corrections in the 1961 reprinting, this book has not been revised since it was first published ten years ago. The progress of Chinese studies since has reduced somewhat the original value of the book but it has not made it out-of-date. The beginning student of Chinese history, for whom the book seems to be primarily aimed, will still find it highly illuminating and useful.

In this connection, attention must also be called to the reference notes which, in order to reduce costs, were published separately in 1954 by Harvard University Press in a companion volume entitled *Research Guide for "China's Response to the West: A Documentary Survey 1839-1923."* This companion volume is still available from its publishers. It contains the footnotes corresponding to the footnote numbers in the main text. Aside from the footnotes, the *Research Guide* also contains extensive discussions of sources on the various persons and topics dealt with in each chapter, a full bibliography of Western, Chinese, and Japanese works, and a glossary of Chinese terms. Although the *Research Guide* of necessity does not take into account the new works that have appeared in the last decade, the budding specialist will still find it a rich storehouse for leads and research topics for his term papers or monographic studies.