

BOOK REVIEWS

China Since 1949. 2nd edition. By Linda Benson. New York: Routledge, 2011. 243 pp. \$29.20 (paper).

Linda Benson has written a wide-ranging and highly readable historical account of China's political, economic, and social transformation from being one of the poorest countries in the world during the mid-twentieth century to a present-day global power—a path she describes as being “tortuously uneven as it has been rapid” (p. 3). Benson offers the general reader and student a succinct review of major episodes that mark China's transformation. The book not only delineates the impact of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) policies on the lives of ordinary citizens, but also reflects, as China's history since 1949 has shown, the fact that revolution rarely leads to the kind of society that revolutionary leadership plans on. Further, the chronologic distinctions between Mao-era and post-Mao era CCP policies are made clear throughout this second edition. Benson shows the importance of CCP policies in shaping the livelihoods of both the urban and rural citizenry as well as the experiences of women and ethnic minorities in particular, while also examining their ramifications on regional, economic, and geopolitical issues since the People's Republic of China's (PRC) birth in 1949. With great detail, *China Since 1949* offers a well-structured and lucid understanding regarding the important differences between past and present CCP policies, which today carefully plan and “address issues systematically” when compared to policy implementations prior to the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, that “were more reaction to events as they developed” (p. 5).

Arranged in four parts, the book's first section titled “China's Past” lays out the text's chapters, introduces the reader to key terms (ch. 1), and gives a short explanation of China's geography as well as a very brief historical overview of China's long-recorded history from the first emperor in 221 BCE to the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949 (ch. 2). Comprising a large portion of the book, Chapters 3 through 10 make up the second section titled “China Under the Communist Party.” Chapters 3 and 4 cover the “New Revolution-

ary Road" (1949–1957) through the "Radical Maoist Phase" (1958–1976), which, when treated as a whole, can be characterized as a time "when policies failed to bring about the kind of revolutionary society" that was envisioned, resulting in a "much more radical stage" of political chaos, economic stagnation, and mass starvation (p. 4). Here, Benson develops the central focus of the book—CCP policy—which, after the death of Mao, aimed to assemble a modern economy through policy experimentation, in which "The Building of a Reform Era China" (ch. 5) reversed Maoist policy and led to an eventual "Deepening Reform" (ch. 6) throughout the 1980s and 1990s that had serious economic, political, and cultural effects.

Chapter 7 investigates the "Challenges of the 1990s" in which large-scale environmental pollution, a growing discontent among minorities over the limits of religious practice, a need for greater equity in access to employment and education, and the continuing increase of corruption were "unanticipated problems" stemming from rapid policy transformation. With special emphasis on the formation of new social classes, education, health care, women and the family, minorities, and environmental issues, contemporary society is the focus of Chapter 8. The remaining two chapters of Part Two cover Beijing's newfound "entrepreneurial spirit" that positioned the country as an economic powerhouse (ch. 9) and the global connections and diplomatic reach (ch. 10) that came with such economic success. The third part, Chapter 11, summarizes China's rapid growth and new international role by comparing the roughly three decades of Maoist policy (1949–1978) with those of the subsequent reform era by asking what "a pattern of dramatic changes and policy reversals" means for the future of the CCP. The book's final section, titled "Documents," contains not narrative text, but thirty-two documents ranging from translated speeches and statements of CCP officials, insights from China-based organizations and websites, as well as periodicals from assorted media sources from around the world covering topics ranging from China's 1950 Marriage Law to recent China-Taiwan relations.

As a whole, the book is successful in illuminating not only the ways China has developed into a global economic power through the impact of recent reforms that moved CCP policies further away from the radical political agenda that dominated prior to 1976, but also in highlighting what remains to be done concerning equal opportunities for both women and minorities, as well as the management of large-scale environmental issues. Undoubtedly, the book's chronological

structure and emphasis on policy transformation make the book highly suitable for undergraduate as well as introductory graduate courses on modern Chinese history. While it can be said that there exist numerous introductory texts covering the overall history of the PRC, Benson's work, a volume in the Pearson series Seminar Studies in History, is unique and insightful due to its historical analysis on the evolution of CCP policy since 1949 and the political, economic, social, and environmental outcomes that have accompanied such policy shifts. While my only reservation is that for a book that makes clear the unequal power relations found under a patriarchal society, there is a relative lack of mention of prominent female figures in the work. Still, for students and teachers interested in understanding the important role of CCP elites in shaping political and economic policy into our most recent decade, and how the lives of women and other marginalized groups were influenced by such political and economic transformations, *China Since 1949* offers an informative and enjoyable read.

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Political Change in Southeast Asia. By Jacques Bertrand. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. 258 pp. \$28.99 (paper).

Political Change in Southeast Asia is a book with grand ambitions. It seeks to provide clear and systematic explanations for patterns of political change in a region that has been described by Donald Emmerson in his 1995 article for *Pacific Review*, "Region and Recalcitrance," as "the most recalcitrant" for students of democratization, because its "states are so diverse, despite their proximity, as to make it difficult to generalize across them" (p. 225). The book proves to be thought provoking on multiple levels, not least because it challenges readers to think seriously about the best approaches to conceptualizing areas of similarity and difference across the region. In this sense, it is a valuable addition to the collection of books that provide politically oriented country-by-country overviews of Southeast Asia.

Bertrand's aim is to examine political change—broadly understood as major changes to political institutions and the composition of elites—in Southeast Asia. While Bertrand acknowledges the cen-