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## China: A Macrohistory

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Huang, Ray. *China: A Macrohistory*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1988. 277pp. \$24.95

In the spring of 1989, the blossoming of the prodemocracy movement and its brutal suppression by the Beijing regime drew worldwide attention and underscored the difficulties of bringing about change in China.

Those who seek historical insights into why reform is so hard to implement in contemporary China would do well to read Ray Huang's *China: A Macrohistory*. Huang, a Ming dynasty (1368-1644) specialist who has taught at several U.S. universities, has produced a concise, readable, interpretive history of China.

Huang's thesis is that China's vast territory and enormous population shaped and constrained the evolution of Chinese politics, economy, and society. China's huge size dictated that a mystical political authority and patriarchal social system—the sociopolitical system of Confucianism—buttress the thinly stretched state apparatus. Furthermore, management of this large agrarian society required that simplicity and uniformity inform the organization and activities of the state.

The need for homogeneity had several ramifications for the polity. First, political power and correctness emanated from the top—the emperor—downward to the peasantry, mediated by a bureaucratic class schooled in ideological cor-

rectness. Political authority was unitary and unidirectional.

Second, in political life, form often superseded content. Higher levels of authority tolerated nominal compliance in implementing policies, as long as lower levels made the correct motions of obedience. Such tolerance was necessary to carry out uniform policies over a vast nation, but over time also resulted in the failure of reforms and the decline of central government power.

Third, the bureaucracy, trained exclusively in the reigning sociopolitical orthodoxy, never developed the technical skills necessary to address the increasingly complex practical problems that began to face China in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Fourth, the state viewed the polity as a collection of villages of small-scale peasant farmers, and based its policies on this simple ideal. No effort was made to break up the cellular nature of the village economy or to develop a national economy beyond the needs of the taxation system. The development of countervailing local interests, institutions, or a legal system that might challenge the political and economic structure was precluded.

As a result, size, Confucianism, and the agrarian-bureaucratic management system made China "mathematically unmanageable" and inhibited efforts to change China. Dynasties fell when the existing taxation and military systems became unable to support

the superstructure of the state, and thus the state lacked the resources to govern and defend the nation. New dynasties reconstituted the state, revived the economy and taxation system, and reinforced the Confucian social system, but remained unwilling and unable to effect the necessary reforms to make China "mathematically manageable."

Yet, Huang contends, beginning with the onslaught of the West in the 19th century, China has been shifting from its outdated agrarian-bureaucratic management to the system of "monetary management" that characterizes modern nations. Monetary management is the application of commercial principles to the governance and economic life of a nation, whether it be capitalist or socialist. Huang believes that China's move to monetary management is irreversible. He maintains, nevertheless, that the strength of the legacy of the past, as testified by the difficult and protracted course of the Chinese Revolution, means that this change will be slow and will experience reverses, contradictions, and readjustments.

*China: A Macrohistory* offers an excellent analysis of the logic of Chinese history to specialists and nonspecialists alike. Huang's concise volume, however, may leave some readers hungering for more details on contemporary China. Those concerned principally with issues related to national security, therefore, should read this book for background, and consult other

works on the People's Republic of China. Finally, in light of the riveting events of the spring of 1989 and the conservative backlash thereafter, Huang's optimistic conclusion that China is well on its way to becoming "mathematically manageable" by modern standards seems premature.

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The Library of Congress  
Washington, D.C.

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Handel, Michael I., ed. *Leaders and Intelligence*. Totowa, N.J.: Frank Cass & Co., Ltd. 1989. 300pp. \$12.95

"There are in any army, and for that matter any big organization, very large numbers of people whose existence is only remembered when something for which they are responsible has gone wrong."

When British Field Marshal Slim pointed this out in recounting his experiences in World War II, he was not specifically referring to the intelligence community. But his comment, included in the anecdotal and highly enjoyable essay by former head of British scientific intelligence, Professor R.V. Jones in *Leaders and Intelligence*, neatly characterizes one of the major themes of this collection.

*Leaders and Intelligence* contains nine essays which were originally delivered during three international conferences on Intelligence and Military Operations that were held at the U.S. Army War College