



At right: Jerome Alan Cohen, author of this reading guide to contemporary China, and Joan Lebold Cohen, who took the other photographs on these pages. This is the second in a series of guides for the interested reader who would seek out the best literature, old and new, in a variety of fields. Next month: Alexander Theroux on book collecting.

## Just fifteen books on China?

It would be a delightful summer diversion. What China-watcher wouldn't relish an assignment to select fifteen good books to introduce general readers to contemporary China? It promised to be easy. After all, I had recently reviewed the state of the art while my wife and I were working on our last book, *China Today* (Harvard Magazine, February 1975, page 31). And the assignment would be worthwhile, spurring me to catch up on a flurry of new books. I had visions of days spent reading in the hammock or on the beach, and evenings devoted to the new parlor game of challeng-



ing fellow Sinologues to name their fifteen favorites.

As the pre-Labor Day deadline approached, however, the summer grew increasingly agonizing. Although my instructions precluded recommending landmark scholarship designed for specialists, I nevertheless felt guilty

about it. Moreover, limiting the list to "popular" books didn't seem to simplify things much. Fifteen is a very small number.

Was I really going to omit Barbara Tuchman's *Stilwell and the American Experience in China* and *Dragon by the Tail* by John Paton Davies Jr., both vivid

accounts of the politics and turmoil that preceded the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949? Could I slight *Mao and China*, the monumental study of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution by Stanley Karnow, or the fine book by Edward E. Rice covering similar ground? And what about *Twentieth Century China*, a valuable overview by O. Edmund Clubb, the most scholarly of the now retired diplomats who served in China?

To make matters worse, many of the authors under consideration are friends and acquaintances in a field where personal relations have usually been pleasant, if not incestuous. Plainly, in order to avoid ulcers or ostracism, some strategy had to be devised.

One modestly helpful technique was to define the subject even more narrowly than my instructions did. By excluding studies of foreign policy and relying instead upon the extended discussions of that topic in books that offered a general introduction to China, I eliminated the need to refer to John Gittings's *The World and China* or Harold C. Hinton's *China's Turbulent Quest*. And I dismissed splendid portraits of earlier eras, such as *Emperor of China* by Jonathan Spence and *Strangers at the Gate* by Frederic Wakeman Jr., as too remote from contemporary China.

By now the reader may suspect that I simply decided to resolve my dilemma by cheating, that is, by resorting to a variety of pretexts for mentioning twice as many choices as my instructions permitted. Yet even this device could not free me from the obligation to select fifteen titles for the formal list requested. What criteria should govern the final solution?

Obviously, the newcomer should see contemporary China in historical perspective. What was traditional China like in 1800, at the height of its splendor? What were the internal sources of its decline in the nineteenth century? Why was China so much slower than Japan in responding to the onslaught of Western imperialism? How did revolution put an end to the millennial Chinese empire? Why did Mao Tse-tung's Communists defeat Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists in the struggle to determine who would modernize their backward nation? How have the Communists exercised power during the past quarter-century? What role has our own country played in the long and complex story of China's efforts to regain strength and self-respect? John K. Fairbank's *The United States and China* is still the classic introduction to

the mystery of Chinese history. Fairbank's work, a synthesis of his ample scholarship and that of others, including his many students, is informative, succinct, and so balanced that he draws fire from both the Communists on the mainland and the Nationalists on Taiwan.

Having thus acquired the necessary background for understanding present-day China, the reader will be better prepared to appreciate *Uncertain Passage*, A. Doak Barnett's masterful assessment of the achievements, problems, and prospects of the People's Republic as it strives to make the transition from its first-generation leaders to a post-Mao era. This is only one of the most recent of Barnett's many sensible, perceptive, and humane books on China since 1949.

Inevitably, although they drop more Chinese names than the beginner can assimilate, even the best overviews fail to convey the flesh-and-blood sense of what the world's largest and most profound revolution has meant for individuals. "China" is no abstraction, nor, even under Mao's version of a totalitarian system, is it a monolith. There are as many Chinas as there are types of people. Judging new China tells as much about the values of the observer as about those of the observed. What the newcomer needs to be exposed to is a variety of experiences and perspectives that will enable him not merely to intellectualize about the multifaceted transformation of China but also to feel it in all its dimensions.

Thus the other selections on my list feature not scholarly syntheses but books—some scholarly, others not—that suggest the roles of different kinds of people in the revolution and what they have thought about it. Originally, I intended to include only ten such books, which would have allowed three other places for academic overviews in addition to those by Fairbank and Barnett. I very much wanted to endorse Lucian W. Pye's *China, An Introduction*, an unsentimental, well-written analysis of China's modernization that is distinguished by the author's ability to blend personal anecdotes with the insights of comparative government and political psychology. I was also enthusiastic about Lucien Bianco's little-known, but original and compact, *Origins of the Chinese Revolution, 1915-1949*, which integrates many specialized studies in a hard-headed, stimulating way. And I planned to cite Immanuel C. Y. Hsu's *The Rise of Modern China* for those who seek more detail and a non-Communist Chinese

## The reading list

- John King Fairbank. *The United States and China* (third edition), Harvard, 1972, \$12; paper, \$4
- A. Doak Barnett. *Uncertain Passage*, Brookings Institution, 1974, \$9.95; paper, \$3.95
- Edgar Snow. *Red Star over China* (revised and enlarged edition), Evergreen, 1968, \$2.95
- Stuart Schram. *Mao Tse-tung*, Simon and Schuster, 1967, \$7.95; Penguin, \$1.95
- William Hinton. *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village*, Monthly Review Press, 1967, \$15; Vintage, \$2.95
- Leon Clark and Peter J. Seybolt, editors. *Through Chinese Eyes*, Praeger, 1974, \$7.50; paper (2 vols.), \$2.75 each
- Mu Fu-sheng. *The Wilting of the Hundred Flowers*, Greenwood, (reprint of 1963 edition), \$14.25
- Kai-yu Hsu. *The Chinese Literary Scene*, Vintage, 1975, \$3.95
- Robert Loh, as told to Humphrey Evans. *Escape from Red China*, Coward, McCann, 1962, out of print
- Gordon A. Bennett and Ronald N. Montaperto. *Red Guard: The Political Biography of Dai Hsiao-ai*, Doubleday/Anchor, 1972, \$1.95
- Bao Ruo-wang and Rudolph Chelminski. *Prisoner of Mao: A Survivor's Account of the State Prison System of the New China*, Coward, McCann, 1973, \$8.95
- Robert Jay Lifton. *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*, Norton, \$8.50; paper, \$3.75
- Ross Terrill. *Flowers on an Iron Tree: Five Cities of China*, Atlantic-Little, Brown, 1975, \$15
- Peng Ming-min. *A Taste of Freedom*, Holt, 1972, \$6.95
- E. J. Kahn Jr. *The China Hands: America's Foreign Service Officers and What Befell Them*, Viking, 1975, \$12.50



Cadres playing traditional instruments at a school outside Peking.

view of the bewildering events of the past three centuries. Yet such is the complexity of People's China that I could not pare the number of "perspective" books below thirteen, and I therefore had to sacrifice the three last-named works, piously hoping that many readers will want to overfulfill their quota.

**T**he Chinese Communist revolution was made by an elite that was unique in vision, drive, ability, tenacity, and longevity. What were the goals, motivations, and policies of this group in the decades before they seized nationwide power? Edgar Snow's memorable *Red Star over China* was based upon his extensive 1936 interviews with Mao Tse-tung, Chou En-lai, Lin Piao, and many other Communist leaders in their blockaded mountain strongholds. It brought the world the first reliable and coherent account of the personal histories and group characteristics of the fascinating band that Snow correctly predicted would make history. Because these leaders are only now passing from the scene, *Red Star* offers important as well as exciting insights into China today.

For four decades, of course, the ultimate leader has been the charismatic Chairman Mao, one of the greatest figures of this or any other century. His strategy, tactics, and ideology have left an indelible mark upon the revolution. Building on the work of Edgar Snow and many other sources, Stuart Schram's authoritative biography traces the twists and turns of Mao's ascent and the

process by which he adapted Marxism—an import from Europe via Russia—to China's distinctive conditions.

Mao recognized that, contrary to Marxist scriptures, if there was to be a genuine revolution in China, it would be fueled by the vast, illiterate peasantry and not the small, industrial proletariat. He would be the first to argue that it is impossible to grasp the problems or the significance of new China unless one is familiar with rural life, especially the economic, political, and social changes created by Communist confiscation, redistribution, and eventual socialization of land. William Hinton's *Fanshen* (the Chinese word for "overturning") documents in unforgettable, eyewitness terms what the land-reform process actually meant for the peasants in one North Chinese village in the late 1940s, and, in doing so, makes clear why the masses were ripe for mobilization by Communist activists and officials.

William Hinton's microcosm is inhabited by real characters. Even revolutionary cadres and militiamen are honestly portrayed as capable of "gradually alienating themselves from the people by arbitrary orders, indiscriminate beatings, the assumption of special privileges, and 'rascal behavior.'" The line between good and evil is more sharply drawn in Peter J. Seybolt's skillfully edited *Through Chinese Eyes*, which draws upon a broad variety of interesting Chinese documents, literature, and propaganda "to re-create the reality of everyday life as experienced by the Chinese people" today and "to let the Chinese speak for themselves." Actually, despite

an occasional attempt to balance the scales, Seybolt predominantly presents the China of Peking Review, China Reconstructs, and other Maoist media. Surely the poverty, disease, corruption, inequality, insecurity, exploitation, and national humiliation of the old society were mind-boggling, and the People's Republic has undoubtedly made great progress toward ridding the country of those and other evils. These volumes render a service by emphasizing the benefits of the new order in very moving terms, but they tend to minimize the costs.

The costs have been great for a number of social classes and strata. *The Wilt-ing of the Hundred Flowers* by Mu Fu-sheng, the pseudonym of a Chinese who studied and worked in the West, returned to China in 1957, and then left again after almost a year, is a tour de force on the plight of millions of "intellectuals," as persons with a high-school education or better are now called in China. It brilliantly demonstrates their ambivalence toward a regime that cannot dispense with their competence and yet cannot cope with their needs.

*The Chinese Literary Scene*, recently published by Kai-yu Hsu, an authority on China's literature who returned to the motherland for six months in 1973, leaves no doubt about the tragedy suffered even by loyal Communist writers. Many have been silenced as "poisonous weeds" because they "insisted that unless the writer was given free rein, he could not create effective literature to support Communism." Kai's book, which contains fine excerpts from the fiction, poetry, and opera currently permitted by the Party and from his interviews with approved authors, points out how "customers line up waiting for each new book like famished diners watching the lone pancake on a slow-heating griddle." This despite the fact that much of what they buy is "an unreal glorification of life under Chinese Communism" in which incorruptible heroes always manage to suppress irredeemable villains. Kai's picture is not entirely depressing, however. He appreciates the desirability of the new mass literacy, the discovery of talent among the laboring classes, and some of the changes that have made literature and opera more accessible to popular audiences.

Writers and intellectuals were not the Communists' only problems when, after defeating the Nationalists, they made the transition from rural "liberated areas" to the country's sophisticated urban cen-

ters. How to expropriate the means of production owned by bourgeois businessmen, while continuing to enlist their energies in the operation of the economy, was a great challenge. Despite its lurid title, Robert Loh's *Escape from Red China* is an absorbing and accurate account of how, through skillful psychological manipulation of the instruments of persuasion and coercion, the Party motivated China's capitalists to compete with each other for the honor of becoming heroes of "socialist transformation" by "voluntarily" surrendering their enterprises to the state as quickly as possible.

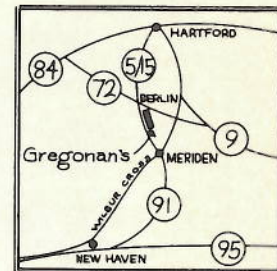
Perhaps the gravest problem that has confronted urban authorities since 1968, when Mao moved to end the Cultural Revolution and restore stability, has been to persuade more than ten million teen-aged students, for whom there are no university places and no city jobs, to settle down permanently in the countryside for a primitive life of agricultural labor. *Red Guard* is more than the biography of a member of the student horde mobilized by Mao during 1966-67 to overthrow "capitalist-roaders" within the Party. It reveals the circumstances and hopes of China's educated youth,

and the frustration and disillusionment they feel when pressured to become instruments of modernization by "going down to the villages and up to the mountains" to help bridge the enormous gap between rural and urban conditions.

**P**ersuasion is the Communists' preferred method of getting people to serve the public interest after centuries of striving for only personal or family gain. Yet underlying all the education, propaganda, and social pressure is a highly efficient police apparatus that extends its network into every courtyard and lane. China's leaders sometimes suggest that only 5 percent of the populace is basically opposed to the revolution. Even if this estimate were accurate, however, it would mean that the regime has to contend with a dissident group roughly as large as the entire population of the United Kingdom, France, or West Germany. Despite the importance of the subject and intense interest in the U.S.S.R.'s Gulag Archipelago, few people outside China know about the even vaster Chinese system of forced

labor for common criminals and serious political offenders. Indeed, not many Americans seem interested in learning, judging by the quiet reception this country has accorded *Prisoner of Mao*, a best seller in France. Bao Ruo-wang's own story of his seven years in various Chinese labor camps may not be literature to rival Solzhenitsyn's, but it makes us aware of the double standard that has been applied in our appraisals of the two Communist societies since the advent of Ping-Pong diplomacy. With more objectivity and humor than one can reasonably expect, Bao takes us to places that are not on any tourist's itinerary.

"Reform through labor" is the Chinese name for the process of ideological indoctrination combined with hard work that is the regimen of the camps. It is an especially intense version of the "thought reform" to which all Chinese are continuously subjected in the course of Mao's Promethean effort to alter the definition of happiness, and even to transform human nature itself. *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism* is psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton's probing study of the premises and techniques of this unprecedented attempt to raise the con-



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Now that this proud, ancient nation is in the position to help other great nations financially, it is obvious that the rest of the world cannot look upon Persia as a land of cottage industries. It is sad but inevitable that in the course of time, fine Persian rugs will be as rare and as sought for as a Simon Willard Clock or a primitive painting by Grandma Moses.

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sciousness of one-quarter of humanity. Lifton's ideas are stimulating; in fact his forty case histories of Chinese and Westerners, whom he interviewed at length, are so interesting that I feel less guilty about my inability to list *Prisoners of Liberation* by Allyn and Adele Rickett, a husband-and-wife team's frank description of their successful thought reform while serving prison sentences for espionage in the early 1950s.

These last few books provide a useful corrective for the Marco Polo-itis that has paralyzed the critical faculties of most Americans who have visited China since détente began. If the authors appear to focus unduly on the darker side of the revolution, perhaps the reader's balance can be restored by Ross Terrill's just published *Flowers on an Iron Tree*. It is a worthy successor to his *800,000,000: The Real China*, the best of the spate of high-level traveler's journals that appeared in the early 1970s. Terrill again reminds us that China is diverse, complex, and subtle, and that the standard of living of the masses seems to be incomparably better than it was before liberation. In *Flowers*, however, he concentrates on in-depth studies of five major Chinese cities—Shanghai, Dairen, Hangchow, Wuhan, and Peking—capturing the distinctive character of each place and its people by interweaving past and present, facts and conversations, with an artist's eye, a writer's craft, and a scholar's learning.

China involves more than the mainland. We must not neglect Taiwan, the island sanctuary of the late Chiang Kai-shek's Republic of China and the principal obstacle to the normalization of relations between the People's Republic, which claims it, and the United States, which defends it against the threat of Peking's forcible takeover. Many Americans have heard of the island's extraordinary economic progress. Yet few know about the political situation in "Free China," which supporters of the Taiwan independence movement assert is neither free nor China. *A Taste of Freedom*, the exciting memoirs of Peng Ming-min, tells how this well-known Taiwanese professor exchanged a secure position as a member of the Nationalist Chinese establishment for a life of political subversion, prison, house arrest, and escape, hoping to gain recognition for a separate national identity for the people of Formosa—as the island is called by those who seek to liberate it from the grip of both contending Chinese governments.

Today, as a generation ago, American

statesmen face the challenge of charting a desirable policy toward China, and the problem remains as much one of domestic politics as of international relations. No President, Secretary of State, or diplomat can be unaware of the sensitivity of the subject, for the effects of the postwar nightmare of national recrimination over "who lost China" that culminated in McCarthyism are still with us. The persecution of Foreign Service officers who honestly and perceptively reported the unpalatable facts of Chinese life in the 1940s unfairly blighted their promising careers, deprived the State Department of their badly needed expertise, and intimidated their successors. *The China Hands*, a new book by E. J. Kahn Jr., does a superb job of telling the whole sordid story, its human as well as political ramifications. Kahn's book draws on publications by many of the protagonists, the best of the academic and popular literature, and his own gift for interview and anecdote. It is a "must" for newcomers, who may not believe that Franklin Delano Roosevelt could ever have appointed a preposterous figure like General Patrick J. Hurley to preside over anything as important as our China policy.

Before embarking on an excursion through my fifteen selections, the reader should beware. These books not only fail to exhaust the subject, but they may not even exhaust the reader. As Art Buchwald discovered, the thing about China-watching is that, an hour after you've had a stomachful, you're hungry for more.

— JEROME ALAN COHEN

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## Hammurabi on malpractice payments, and other aspects of medical anthropology

Guido Majno. *The Healing Hand: Man and Wound in the Ancient World*. Harvard University Press. \$25

Ten years ago, at an afternoon garden party near Boston, Guido Majno—a distinguished pathologist of 43—was telling a prominent, elderly surgeon about his plan to write a history of the