

**CHINA: ITS HISTORY
AND CULTURE**

by **W. Scott Morton**

(Lippincott & Crowell, 276 pp, \$16.95)

Robert J. Myres

There is a separate Yin and Yang, or at least a separate hexagram at work, governing the rise and fall of books on China. With the reopening of China to the world, the number of books about Mao's regime has reached landslide proportions. In the midst of such an onslaught it is truly a pleasure to find W. Scott Morton's *China: Its History and Culture*, for Morton, with an economy of words, is able to place all these events in the sweep of China into a remarkably lucid progression. The result is a lively, clear account of highlights of over two thousand years in art, politics, and government.

One cannot avoid comparing this volume to the classic work of Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The Chinese, Their History and Culture* (first published in 1934, with a fourth edition in 1964). Morton's book is written in a less scholarly style, but there is nothing inferior about his scholarship. In addition there are forty-two excellent illustrations marred slightly by the dullness of the paper stock.

The first Chinese dynasty about which there is solid archeological evidence is the Shang, memorialized in its splendid bronze castings. This was also the age of the "oracle bones," when heated tortoise shells and the shoulder blade bones of deer divined the future for those qualified to read the portents of the cracks. It was on these "bones" that literal pictograms, the earliest version of Chinese language characters, appeared.

The book proceeds quickly through the rise and fall of the early dynasties and into the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. with the introduction of Buddhism and the "flowering of Chinese civilization" under the Sui (589-618 A.D.) and the Tang dynasties (618-907) in such arts as painting and poetry. The latter was also an era of economic strength, which brought about the extension of the Great Wall, the digging of more canals, and the construction of palaces. The Chinese reasserted themselves militarily in Central Asia, where trouble in the person of Genghis Khan was to come some centuries later.

Under the Tang the Chinese had

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SOLZHENITSYN

THE MORAL VISION By **Edward E. Ericson, Jr.**
Foreword by **Malcolm Muggeridge**

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, whose fame as a novelist has nearly been overshadowed by his prominence as political critic, stands firmly in the tradition of Christian humanism, insists Ericson in this work-by-work analysis. It is in this strong moral vision that Ericson finds the underlying unity and power which inform Solzhenitsyn's literary as well as political expression. *Cloth, \$12.95*

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widespread contact with all their neighbors, sending military aid as far west as Persia. Wood block printing and rag paper were among the exports to the West. As for government, a civil service examination system was established, which soon formed a new gentry class to supplant the aristocracy.

Poetry was probably unsurpassed in the Tang dynasty. The memory of one of the greatest poets, Tu Fu, is honored in the preservation today of his "cottage" near Chengdu in Sichuan province. A visit to this shrine recreates the moment and the mood. Both Tu Fu and Li Po relied occasionally on spirits to unleash their verse. Li Po said this of a love:

Her robe is a cloud, her face a
flower
Her balcony, glimmering with the
bright spring dew
Is either the top of earth's jade
mountain
or a moon-edged roof of paradise.

And in the Southern Sung the epitome of landscape painting was reached, well illustrated in this volume. There is authoritative commentary on painting techniques and the unique point of view of the Chinese landscape artist—not at eye level, as Westerners paint, but halfway up the opposite hill. Horizontal scroll painting was perfected in this period, "a true progression through time." In architecture, too, as one can observe today in Peking at the Temple of Heaven and the Forbidden City, there is this same preference for the

horizontal perspective, a contrast with the Western concept of the vertical, as in the skyline of Manhattan.

Meanwhile, warring on the frontiers continued, with the Mongol Invasion and the brief Yuan Dynasty (1280-1368), which was succeeded by the last Chinese dynasty, the Ming (1368-1644). Then come the Manchus and the impact with the West, which is brilliantly described as a clash of civilizations and international state systems based on profoundly different concepts of the world.

How to cope with this foreign force and its different learning absorbed most of the energies of the last dynasty before Sun Yat-sen's republic in 1911. The Chinese clung to their learning as the substance of their civilization, studying the West for pragmatic reasons. According to Morton, "Wholesale, radical modernization or Westernization was thus never seriously entertained as an aim among the leaders of China in the nineteenth century."

And what of the twentieth century, under the Communist ideology? Latourrette was obviously shaken by the communization of China, but in the 1964 edition of his book he counseled patience in the belief that the goodness of the Chinese people, whom he loved, would reassert itself, somehow rise above the worst aspects of Communist cruelty and create a new and happier age. Morton writes that the revolution is not yet over, that there are ongoing "contradictions" (a favorite word of Mao, linking him to Marx) between

the "red" element, ideological purity, and the "expert" element, practical economics. The trial of the "Gang of Four" suggests a new synthesis of those opposing tendencies. For a time the practical men, like Deng Xiaoping, are in the ascendency. Theirs is an uncertain road, given the enormous population pressure on too few resources. The lesson of the Yin and Yang—the conflicting forces in nature, the light and the dark, the female and male—is that though certain sages see one or the other element in temporary ascendancy, the division of the circle remains always equal and the same, in its necessary cosmic harmony. [wv]

THE CHINESE

by David Bonavia

(Lippincott & Crowell; 290 pp.; \$12.95)

"EXPLAINING CHINA"

by Steve Allen

(Crown Publishers; 399 pp.; \$14.95)

Howard Goldblatt

Why is it that the more China is "explained" to us, the more tenuous our grasp? The two books under review are among several recent attempts by Westerners to increase our understanding of contemporary China. If they are not totally successful, they at least reflect the state of the art and the importance of the attempt. Both works are serious in intent, and both are by concerned and intelligent observers. Yet only one can be taken seriously by those who seek a truly instructive view of China.

David Bonavia, chief of the London *Times* Peking Bureau, is an astute observer of contemporary Chinese life as well as a student of recent Chinese history. While he is occasionally given to questionable editorializing, he nonetheless makes every attempt to describe rather than judge the country to which he has been assigned. The scope and quality of his observations should appeal to the general public. But there are problems.

This otherwise penetrating and revealing study of contemporary China is burdened with an excess of sometimes misleading information. Moreover, it is rendered almost meaningless by the total absence of source citations. Although it would be unfair to expect

CHINA WRAP-UP

Other recent books on Western encounters with China, and Chinese encounters with the West, may interest our readers. The Canadian journalist John Fraser presents a richly anecdotal account of his two-year stay in the PRC in **The Chinese: Portrait of a People** (Summit Books; 463 pp.; \$14.95). In **James G. Endicott: Rebel Out of China** (University of Toronto Press; 421 pp.; \$18.95), Stephen Endicott undertakes to vindicate his father, a Christian missionary and social reformer in China before 1949. In **the Eye of the Typhoon: An American Woman Shares in the Upheavals of China's Cultural Revolution, 1966-1978** (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; 284 pp.; \$12.95) by Ruth Earnshaw Lo and Katherine S. Kinderman speaks for itself. In **Watch Out for the Foreign Guests: China Encounters the West** (Pantheon; 178 pp.; \$8.95), Orville Schell evokes some of the bizarre consequences of China's half-open door and considers the political repercussions. Among the forthcoming books that have come to our attention are **The Road to Confrontation: American Policy Toward China and Korea** by William Whitney Stueck, Jr. (University of North Carolina Press; 448 pp.; \$20/\$10), **Inside China** by Malcolm MacDonald, with photographs by William MacQuitty (Little Brown; 208 pp.; \$19.95); **Borodin: Stalin's Man in China** by Dan N. Jacobs (Harvard University Press; 448 pp.; \$25.00).