

THE CAMBRIDGE ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF
China
SECOND EDITION





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Cambridge University Press
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Patricia Buckley Ebrey
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Foreword

by Kwang-Ching Liu

Chinese history has often been seen as a mirror image of the history of the West. After the unification of China under the Qin (221–206 BC) and the Han (202 BC–AD 220), successor regimes were overwhelmed, like Rome, by nomadic people of the northern frontiers and by the infusion of a foreign religion. But China, unlike Rome, was to rise again, into a centralized, universal empire under the Tang (618–906). Many of the Han imperial institutions were revived. The aristocracy, powerful since the late Han, still retained its influence, but it recognized a universal sovereign with real authority. Unlike the feudal lords of Europe, the aristocrats in Tang China needed the ranks and titles dispensed by the imperial court to give them prestige required for the protection of their vast landed estates.

From Tang to Song (960–1279) came greater centralization of imperial power and transformation of the aristocracy into a social-bureaucratic elite, of whom an increasing number were products of a mature examination system. The Chinese gentry, a term often used to refer to retired officials in the context of their home communities, essentially identified with the imperial state. With the spread of lineage organizations during the Ming and Qing, Confucian social ethics grew to be recognized as norms on which the government of China depended.

The history of imperial China, a subject of intrinsic interest, gains further fascination with the rise of China as a world power, especially in the 1990s. What can be learned, for example, about Chinese attitudes towards the Muslim world west and northwest of China, especially since the Yuan (Mongol) dynasty (1260–1368)? What lessons are there in the non-existence of a politically active business class despite the growth in long-distance trade and the significant urbanization from the Song through to the twentieth century?

Patricia Buckley Ebrey is our foremost scholar of Chinese family and kinship from the Han to the Song, and has meticulously analysed the cultural and social outlook of the social-bureaucratic elite, both men and women, as well as the capping (coming of age), wedding and funeral rituals prescribed by Song monarchs and philosophers. Editor of a widely used source book, *Chinese Civilization and Society*, she has extended her analysis through the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) to twentieth-century developments. In calm and refined prose, she brings her vast learning regarding earlier history to bear on China's present, in the belief that continuity in history is inevitable.

The splendid collection of pictures in the following pages displays the results of a painstaking search; the features on aspects of Chinese life (from ceramics to cuisine) and on the lives of distinguished writers add to the volume's appeal. But it is the author's careful and clear synthesis of China's long history that is most remarkable. This book will, in time, I believe, be regarded as a classic.

Preface

A westerner visiting China for the first time is likely to find much that intrigues, surprises, confuses, inspires, or dismays. The sheer number of Chinese is staggering. There are more than a billion Han Chinese—more than the entire population of Eastern and Western Europe and North America put together. Why haven't differences in dialect, religion, or way of life led them to divide up into mutually suspicious groups in the way of so much of the rest of the world? How can a single government cope with ruling so many people? A visitor will also wonder about Chinese as individuals. Men and women observed working in the fields, buying or selling in the markets, doting on their children in parks, enjoying their meals at restaurants: What are their lives like? How has the tumult of the last century affected them and their families? Are any of them still true-believing Maoists?

The landscape of China is likely to make a deep impression as well. Throughout China Proper (the region settled by the people speaking Chinese), land to grow crops has been treated as too precious to waste on less productive purposes like pasturing animals. Even forested hills that might have provided lumber and firewood have often been cleared and terraced to grow grain. What connections are there between Chinese techniques of agriculture and Chinese modes of social and political organization? Urban spaces also raise questions. In Chinese cities, the past does not loom before one in the physical presence of statues of famous generals and statesmen, nor can one search out many old houses, churches, and palaces where great events of the past occurred. Even famous ancient capitals like Xi'an, Luoyang, Nanjing, and Beijing lack visible monuments on the order of those found in Rome, Athens, London, or Paris. Do the Chinese have no heroes of the sorts we are familiar with, or are heroes celebrated a different way?

In museums, it is true, visible relics of an older China can be found, but these artifacts raise questions of their own. Ancient masterpieces—bronze ritual vessels, paintings, calligraphy, and porcelains—often seem to be silent indictments of the visual dreariness of much of contemporary China, raising troubling questions: Has the high point of Chinese culture already passed? Has the cultural link between the past and the present become so attenuated that the two might as well be viewed as different cultures? Those who discover themselves asking these questions may well begin to wonder whether they are being fair: Am I judging the aesthetic attainments of Chinese culture by western, not Chinese aesthetic standards? Am I comparing the elite culture of the past to a mass culture of the present? This book was written for those who enjoy pondering these sorts of questions.

China is an extraordinarily complex society that has been in the making for several thousand years, and its present is not comprehensible without an understanding of its past. Contrary to the old western view of China as stagnant or

unchanging, as almost without history, the story of how China came to be the huge country we know today is one full of drama. In each period Chinese made use of what they inherited, but also came up with new ideas and practices as they struggled to find meaning or peace, to impose their will or contend with opponents, to survive and thrive, to care for their families and fulfill their duties, in the process creating the society we call China. The present thus is rooted in a complex, multi-layered, dynamic past that always had the potential to develop in ways it did not, meaning that every stage provides an essential part of the story.

One could write a general history of 'greater China', the region of east Asia in which China was the dominant power, much of which is now included within the political borders of the People's Republic of China. However, I have set myself a smaller task, the history of Chinese civilization, a civilization never confined within well-demarcated borders, but loosely associated with what is called China proper. When neighbors imposed their rule on Chinese populations, my point of reference is the impact of the encounter on Chinese people and Chinese culture, not the other way around. Although I have narrowed the meaning I give 'China', I have not narrowed my focus to the Chinese state or the Chinese upper class. My focus is on the Chinese people and the culture they have created.

NOTE ON THE SECOND EDITION

For an author, it is always gratifying to find that a book gets read. The first edition went through eight printings in its first dozen years. It also was translated into several languages, including Chinese, Korean, German, Polish, Russian, Greek, and Spanish. I was particularly pleased by the response of Chinese readers. Three distinct editions appeared, one in simplified characters with the full set of color pictures, one in simplified Chinese and black and white pictures to make it less expensive, and one in traditional characters.

The main reason for a new edition of this book is the scale of change in China since the mid-1990s. China's economy has grown spectacularly and China has become more and more deeply enmeshed in the world outside it, not only through trade and investment, but also through the movement of people, ideas, and technologies. Moreover, fascination with China continues to stimulate the creation of new books and articles on a wide range of China-related topics, which encourages the rethinking of many issues.

The most important changes I have made to the second edition of this book are a new final section to the chapter on China under Mao, an entirely new chapter on China since Mao, and a fully revised Further Reading. The theme that I tried to weave through this book—China as a society and culture constructed over time, its meanings and its borders changing as the Chinese pursue meaning and security in an ever-changing international context—still seems to be a valid and useful way to think about Chinese history.

Patricia Buckley Ebrey

Acknowledgements

Part of the pleasure of preparing this book was getting to pore over a great many wonderful art and archaeology publications in search of good illustrations. As I tried to narrow down my choices, I showed my preliminary selections to other China specialists, and often received excellent advice in return. I would particularly like to acknowledge the advice of Wu Hong, Ellen Laing, Joseph McDermott, and Jessica Rawson, each of whom had many suggestions to make. I am just as indebted to colleagues who have generously read and commented on one or more chapters: Roger Ames, Alan Baumler, Kai-wing Chow, John Dardess, Peter Gregory, Emily Hill, and David Keightley. For assistance with the mechanics of preparing this book, I would like to thank three graduate research assistants, supported at different times by funds from the University of Illinois's Research Board: Yao Ping, Kathy Battles, and Samantha Blum. I also owe a debt to the late Professor Kwang-ching Liu, who passed away in 2006 at age 84, for contributing a foreword.

My greatest debt is to other scholars of China. Everything I have learned during forty years studying Chinese history has had some influence on the shape and content of this book. Still, I did not write it with my desk clear, trying to distill from memory what I knew of the course of Chinese history, but with a desk continually overflowing with books and articles. I re-read many pieces I vaguely recalled as trenchant or stimulating. I looked through—and sometimes became totally engrossed in—books I had purchased over the years but never before found enough time actually to read. I hope that authors who recognize places where I have adopted their interpretations will feel pleased that I was persuaded by their evidence and arguments rather than annoyed that they receive no credit beyond mention in 'Further Reading'.

To the memory of
Lloyd Eastman and
Howard Wechsler