

CHINA'S LAST EMPIRE: The Great Qing. By William T. Rowe. Cambridge (MA) and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009. 360 pp. (Maps, illus., B&W photos.) US\$35.00, cloth. ISBN 978-0-674-03612-3.

To cover almost three centuries of any period in Chinese history is sufficiently daunting, but perhaps no equivalent span embraced so many changes, and consequently forms so great a challenge for the historian, as the Qing dynasty (1644-1912). In *China's Last Empire: The Great Qing*, a volume in Harvard University Press's ambitious History of Imperial China series, William T. Rowe succeeds eminently in this endeavour. His balanced and coherent overview, couched in engaging prose, is the best single-volume general history of the Qing now available in English.

Roughly equal attention is given to the periods before and after 1800, itself a testament to Rowe's erudite command of the dynasty's entire span. The first half of the book favours a more thematic approach, devoting chapters to "Governance," "Society" and "Commerce." The remainder necessarily gives more attention to *l'histoire événementielle*, as the imperial government weathered a series of violent internal and external blows before collapsing in 1912, but the author draws on the foundation already laid to rehearse succinctly the social, economic and intellectual consequences of political upheaval. Further continuity is provided by themes to which Rowe unobtrusively returns over the course of his survey. One is the conscious minimalism of the imperial state, both in its revenue extraction and administrative penetration, which left it ill-equipped to confront more intensively governed foreign rivals in the nineteenth century. Another is the significant role of benevolent organizations in the eighteenth century, a precursor to the increased power of "nongovernmental elites in local society" (207) after the Taiping Rebellion. A third is the debate, evolving over the course of the dynasty, about imperial "statecraft" in general, and particularly the relative advantages and pitfalls of devolving formal administrative authority onto influential members of the local gentry. All of these issues, as the author observes, offer approaches for considering the Qing legacy in the twentieth century.

A great merit of this book is its ability to synthesize the best, and often the most recent, scholarship plainly and engagingly. Judicious and lucid reviews of historiographical debates are provided sparingly where necessary. Introductory and advanced readers will profit alike from the author's deep acquaintance with the field, and the extensive bibliography provided. The book is carefully researched and edited; apart from a very small number of typographical errors, only minor quibbles can be made. For instance, Ya'qub Beg did not have British encouragement when he invaded Xinjiang, as Rowe seems to suggest (75), though he gained it later. Although Rowe generally transcribes Manchu names from the Manchu, he refers to the regent Oboi in a Chinese form, Ebai (not Aobai, the more standard Chinese rendering of the name). Mysteriously, the map of the empire in 1800 (map 1) gives

"Tibet" in the bold type reserved elsewhere for foreign countries, not that used for Mongolia, Xinjiang, and other frontier areas; if deliberate, this would seem to require some explanation.

Among the recent historiographical shifts noted by Rowe is the "Inner Asian turn" toward viewing Qing China as "simply one component, though quite obviously the most central and economically productive one" (6), within a larger Manchu-ruled "multinational, universal empire ... [that] incorporated non-Han peoples such as Mongols, Jurchens, Tibetans, Inner Asian Muslims, and others..." (284). Especially when working with limited space, there will be different views on how best to apportion out attention to these various groups. This book is fundamentally a history of Qing-era China, in a series on imperial China. When recent literature on the empire's diversity impinges on Chinese history—particularly in regard to issues of Manchu ethnicity and non-Han groups on the empire's southern fringe—it is given detailed consideration. Otherwise, the comprehensive treatment of China leaves other realms of the empire, such as Tibet, Xinjiang and Mongolia, very much in the shade.

China's Last Empire is a thorough and reliable guide to China under Qing rule. Like Frederic Wakeman Jr.'s 1975 *The Fall of Imperial China*, to which Rowe offers his work as a "current counterpart" (345), this fine book will assuredly and deservedly become a preferred choice for courses in Chinese history. It is essential, edifying and enjoyable reading for anyone interested in that subject.

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WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY TAIWAN. By Doris T. Chang. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009. xi, 228 pp. (Maps.) US\$45.00, cloth. ISBN 978-0-252-03395-7.

Taiwan is widely known as the first freely elected "Chinese democracy." It also holds the distinction of being among the first in the world to elect a female vice president. Hsiu-lien Annette Lu's tenure as vice president of Taiwan between 2000 and 2008 is especially noteworthy, for she not only happens to be a woman, but also a feminist—indeed, the pioneer of Taiwan's postwar feminist movement. This fascinating figure is at the centre of *Women's Movements in Twentieth-Century Taiwan*, the first published English-language monograph on the topic.

Doris Chang's book provides a comprehensive history of women's activism in Taiwan, which she divides into several phases: the Japanese colonial era from 1895 to 1945; the era of KMT government-affiliated women's organizations from 1945 to 1972; the "Pioneering Stage" of an autonomous women's movement, led by Annette Lu between 1972 and

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