

J.C. EADE, *The Thai Historical Record. A Computer Analysis*. Tokyo: The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies for Unesco. The Toyo Bunko, 1996. XIX, 265 pp., DM 103,-. ISBN 4-89656-109-0

One of the nightmares of historians of South East Asian countries are the dates found on inscriptions, in chronicles or in colophons to manuscripts, because they contain detailed information on days, month, years and on the positions of the planets, including, of course, sun and moon on the particular date the text was completed or an inscription made. All this can be understood and evaluated in full only by those few specialists equipped with a solid knowledge of traditional astrology/astronomy. Even then, according to the author, calculating a date exactly might well take up to six hours for every single *duang* or diagram depicted on top of a stone inscription or described in a text. Still, an exact calculation is necessary to check the correctness of the dates given. Consequently, it is a boon that J.C. Eade has developed a computer programme which makes it possible to find any date quickly. To demonstrate its usefulness, a large number of dates from inscriptions and from Thai chronicles such as the *Jinakâlamâlinî* have been calculated, sometimes correcting earlier errors and discussing difficulties arising from insufficient data or from mistakes in the dates as found in the inscriptions or texts. The results are presented in this volume in great detail. Moreover, the relevant technical terms are also explained. Thus this volume together with J.C. Eade's earlier contribution to the *Handbuch der Orientalistik* (1995) proves to be an excellent research tool for historians and an indispensable handbook for any scholar working on the history of this area.

Oskar von Hinüber

WILLIAM J.F. JENNER, *The Tyranny of History. The Roots of China's Crisis*. (Penguin History). London: Penguin, 1994. 288 pages, £ 7.99. ISBN 0-14-014677-6

Over the last two decades a transformation has occurred in the People's Republic of China (PRC). Shortly after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, the "open door" policy was introduced by the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). This has produced a transformation in the economic conditions and economic performance of the PRC. It has also had profound implications for social and political structures in China. In particular, it has meant prodigious growth rates of 10% and more over much of this period

within the world's largest nation (which comprises approximately 20% of the world's population). Western commentators are regularly delighted, amazed, bewildered and somewhat frightened by these developments in about equal measure. India, which is almost the same size as China in terms of population, is never talked of in the same way as the PRC - namely, as a country which may shake the very foundations of the entire world. The combination of China's growth, monumental size and potential, especially as exemplified by the Chinese-influenced mini-dragons of East Asia, helps explain why this is so.

This important book tries to grapple with many of the issues thrown up by any consideration of China's place in the world. As a Professor of Chinese and possessed of a deep understanding of history, Jenner is particularly well placed to comment.

The author's thesis is that China is and has been in a state of crisis for a long period which predates the success of the CCP in the Chinese Civil War, in 1949. He does not argue that the CCP is largely responsible for this crisis. On the contrary, he sees the crisis as the product of China's quite remarkable history. The CCP, as much as any previous rulers of China, governs in grip of this history. China's history is remarkable in terms of its achievements; most significant technological advances achieved in Europe during and after the Renaissance had been achieved in China considerably earlier. Jenner places stress, however, not on the impact of these achievements but on the crucial ability of the past to control the future in China. The highly sophisticated (and early developed) system of Chinese writing is seen as both the world's most sophisticated form of written expression and also its most enslaving because of its remarkable durability over time. That is, the system of writing and the practices and policies which went with it in China's multi-thousand year, Imperial history, have been crucial, according to this thesis, in creating the sense of timelessness and the omnipresence of the past in the present.

The analysis is a powerful one. The author's basically pessimistic analysis is tempered by a closing chapter which considers ways in which Chinese political and social structures may progress. In this chapter, emphasis is laid on the possibilities of local solutions emerging if the extent of centralized control in the world's greatest and longest lasting unitary state can be relaxed. The book was first published in 1991. An afterword has been added to this 1994 edition in which the original thesis is essentially maintained.

The author warns the reader that he has not tried to present a balanced argument or to emphasize the good and attractive sides of Chinese cultures. He has concentrated, instead, on the powerful problems which beset the PRC. Despite this qualification, one is struck by a certain incompleteness in his thesis. The description and analysis of the many factors which have

played a part in producing the extraordinary nation which is China, which range across language and political structures and economic sectors, have a "top down" feel. One is left with a powerful impression of imposition from above. Given the indisputable hierarchical and autocratic nature of Chinese political structures, this is, perhaps, to be expected. A short reflection on some basic features of wider human experience, however, suggests that to produce a system so vast and enduring requires widespread support or, at the very least, resigned acceptance even when most of the population is barely literate and poorly educated. Another way of putting this is that the systems which Jenner describes seem somehow to have endured *because they work*. This means that, rightly or wrongly, ordinary people have, over the centuries, found that the systems and the values have had real utility. Even a lack of knowledge of alternatives does not stop ordinary people from knowing when something about their system of government is fundamentally wrong, especially over a 2000 year plus time frame. This is not meant as a justification for the practices of Imperial China (which, as Jenner convincingly explains, continue to this very day in many ways). But it would seem to be a component in explaining the extraordinary durability and continuity of Chinese systems; and the Chinese state. In terms of understanding the history of China and its problems and how they may or may not be resolved in the future, the reader would have benefitted from a greater emphasis on "bottom up" explanations of why certain things are as they are. In East Asia, as in the West, everyone plays *some* part in history even in autocratic history.

All that said, this is an excellent book. It is very well written, clearly presented and highly thought provoking. It provides an especially useful counter-weight to the stream of more journalistic commentary on the PRC, especially from North America. Perhaps the strongest measure of the book's merit is that, having read it, one finds oneself making a firm mental note to seek out other works by the same author as soon as possible.

Richard Cullen

DAVID S.G. GOODMAN / GERALD SEGAL (eds.), *China Deconstructs. Politics, Trade and Regionalism*. London/New York: Routledge, 1994. XIV, 364 pages, £ 12.99 (pb), ISBN 0-415-11834-4. £ 40.00 (hb), ISBN 0-415-11833-6

The present volume is the outcome of a joint project on recent trends in Chinese regionalism which involved a number of British, Australian, American and Chinese authors. It must be given pride of place as the best