

VI - 73 C - 5. Smedley, Agnes, "China's Great Past" book review of A Short History of the Chinese People by Carrington Goodrich - The Nation, July 8, 1944 pp. 51-52.

man, which Mr. Miller is not. Undoubtedly, the job has been done in an extraordinary fashion.

I quote at random from the "Hallucination."

"The scandalous sway of Miss West's hips—it reminds me of nothing so much as the motion of a cradle; it is hypnotic, soothing, a finished and flawless equilibrium." Of Charlie Chaplin's mustache Mr. Tyler says: "That fat eel . . . frantically imprisoned in the fishbowl of his face." Then there is this: "After fire, after burning faggots, had served all the practical needs of his life, man cooked his mind over the symbolic fire of the night and achieved the *concept*."

This last statement is taken from a fearsome chapter called *The Daylight Dream*. It was while reading this section that I found myself screaming, "I want out!" I had come across the following: "The ritual of the daydream at night, of which artificial illumination is the symbol, cannot be abandoned merely because of the 'daylight-saving' philosophy of bourgeois capitalism. What is religion? Is it not . . ."

Finally, I give one instance of Mr. Tyler's humor. In discussing the film "King's Row" he writes: ". . . all is not hotsy-totsy on the right side of the old town—you can bet the Judith Anderson in your home on that."

This is a Serious book. Among the chapter headings are: *The Play Is Not the Thing*, *The Technicolor of Love*, and *To Be or Not to Be*; or the *Cartoon Triumphant*.

VICTOR WOLFSON

(VI-73-C-5)
China's Great Past

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE CHINESE PEOPLE. By L. Carrington Goodrich. Harper and Brothers. \$2.50.

AUTHENTIC Chinese history from the Neolithic Age to the present is here compressed into a short volume by a scholar who knows his subject, and who also knows how to write. There are many helpful sketch maps, a supplementary reading list, a chronological table, and a chart comparing China's different historical periods with those of the West. The fifteen pages of photographs of China's art works and scientific inventions are beautifully done.

The West has unfortunately known China during a period of decline—and has contributed basically to that decline. For thousands of years, however, China was a progressive, adventurous, inventive country with contacts of every conceivable nature with the known world. Not only did many of the great civilizing inventions come from China, but China enriched its own culture by importing animals, plants, and scientific and philosophic discoveries from other countries. Its emphasis upon the cultivation of the human mind and spirit is indicated by its invention of printing with movable type and of rag paper (150 A.D.), as a substitute for wood and silk. From its earliest days China used silk, the compass, the sun dial, water clocks, water mills. Our "China-ware" indicates its origin.

The cultivation of tea, with its therapeutic values—as a cure for burns and intestinal diseases—was known to the early Chinese, and the porcelain industry developed at about the same time and in the same regions. In the first century after Christ the scientist Wang Ch'ung, who among other things combated superstition, wrote these pregnant lines:

On an average there is one moon eclipse to about 180 days, and a solar eclipse in about every 41 or 42 months. Eclipses are regular occurrences and are not caused by political action. All anomalies and catastrophes are of the same class and are never dependent upon political events.

Galileo, it may be remembered, published his discoveries of sunspots in 1613, whereas Chinese astronomers observed and recorded them in 28 B.C. In 132 A.D. a Chinese scientist invented an instrument which registered earthquakes so slight that they could not be felt in his observatory.

These pages unroll a majestic panorama of the great dynasties under which Chinese civilization reached a level unknown in any other part of the world save for a brief period in ancient Greece. There was the classical age of the Chou dynasty (1027-256 B.C.); the exciting age of the militant, creative Ch'ins (221-207 B.C.), when the founder tried to destroy feudalism and develop a centralized state—the word "China" comes from that dynasty; the imperial, learned age of the Hans (202 B.C.-220 A.D.), with a continuous expansion of territory and a culture so impressive that present-day Chinese call themselves the "sons of Han"; the renaissance under the T'angs (618-906 A.D.), known as the golden age of literature and the arts, when "whoever was a man was a poet"; the Sung period of ripe maturity when lyric poetry gave way to learned prose, to great compendiums of history and works on natural science and political economy. There followed a period of decay, enabling the Mongols to found the Yuan dynasty—and the Mongols were absorbed and eventually overthrown by the Mings, who became the exquisites of the Eastern world—until they repeated the

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mistakes of their forbears and were conquered by the Manchus. They grew soft and decadent, became tools in the hands of the Western capitalist powers, and were overthrown by the Republic in 1911.

One of my favorite Chinese statesmen, Wang An-shih, occupies a few paragraphs in this book. He is shown instituting great social, political, and military reforms, among others the organization of public schools in each prefecture and subprefecture in the empire—until the reactionaries drove him out and allowed the country to be conquered.

The section covering the Chinese Republic is brief but on the whole good. The Chinese Academia Sinica to promote research in modern science is described and analyzed, but all too briefly. "China has had difficulties with many foreign powers since 1912," writes the author, magnificently understating the fact. The Chinese people, he says, are essentially liberty-loving, industrious, and passive; I disagree with the last word. "Sharp cleavages between political groups may necessitate an oligarchy," he writes—just as if an oligarchy had not ruled since 1927. The government has remained in power, he states, with the apparent "support of the majority of the people"—though the people have nothing to say about it. Not even Dr. Hu Shih, whom he rightly quotes as an authority on Chinese history and thought, can vote in China. Only if the Chinese people had the right to hear all political ideas and choose between them in secret ballot should we know whom they would support. In our admiration of China we must not forget that Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek has been elected President by about a hundred men.

AGNES SMEDLEY

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