

CHINA IN WORLD HISTORY

Also by S. A. M. Adshead

CENTRAL ASIA IN WORLD HISTORY

MATERIAL CULTURE IN EUROPE AND CHINA, 1400–1800

PROVINCE AND POLITICS IN LATE IMPERIAL CHINA

SALT AND CIVILIZATION

THE MODERNIZATION OF THE CHINESE SALT
ADMINISTRATION

THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY
ENGLAND AND BEYOND

China in World History

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To the memory of Joseph Fletcher Jr.

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Preface to the Third Edition

This preface outlines the major new advances in scholarship which need to be incorporated into this book. It has been said that the past is so interesting because it is always changing: through the revision of old answers, the raising of new questions, the opening of fresh fields, the discovery of further evidence and the alteration of perspectives. Such change must impinge especially on a book which took so broad a canvass: the history of China's interaction with the other primary civilizations and with a provisional global order of world institutions. That canvass was borrowed from Joseph Needham's books, the masterpiece of Cambridge University Press, and from Joseph Fletcher's lectures, surely among the most brilliant ever delivered in Cambridge by the Charles. Both combined singularity and synthesis, exact scholarship and ambitious speculation. The impingements may therefore conveniently be grouped under the particular and the general. Four particular advances need to be noted in the fields of religious Taoism, Sung etatisme, international monetarism, and global consumerism.

First, in Chapter 2, on T'ang cosmopolitanism, more attention would now have to be paid to Taoism, as both an element in China's structure and factor in its foreign resonance. In few branches of Sinology has greater progress been achieved in the last quarter century than in the study of the *Tao-chiao*, the Taoist religion. The work of Michael Strickmann, especially, shifted the focus of interest from the *Tao-te ching*, a philosophic work of linguistic scepticism, to the *Tao-tsang*, the Taoist canon or patrology, the *san-tung*, three arcana, and *ssu-fu*, four supplements. Research here, by Strickmann himself, Nathan Sivin, N.J. Girardiot and Isabelle Rodinot made it plain that the Taoism of history was not, as Needham supposed, a protoscientific naturalism, but a succession of religious epiphanies, dating in the main to late antiquity. Taoism was China's indigenous, revealed, mystery religion. What was revealed was a cosmic

chemotherapy, a perfection of man by nature and of nature by man, presided over by a celestial bureaucracy of consultants, male and female. The rise of the Taoist religion formed part of that elite turn to religiosity which characterized China in late antiquity, of which Buddhism was the chief, but not the only instance.

In late antiquity, Taoism was no second eleven. It was the house religion of the T'ang dynasty, and something more. T.H. Bartlett has recently analyzed this patronage of the *Tao-chiao* by successive T'ang rulers.¹ Given precedence over Confucianism and Buddhism by Kao-Tsu in 624, a status confirmed by T'ai-tsung in 637, Taoism received particular support from that underrated ruler Kao-tsung, who was not mere cipher to his wife the Empress Wu. Wu herself was by no means exclusively Buddhist in her patronage, but it was under what Bartlett calls the T'ang restoration, Jui-tsung in particular, that the Taoist establishment expanded fastest. As with much else in Imperial China, Taoism reached its apogee in the reign of Empress Wu's grandson, Hsüan-tsung. The cult of Lao-tsu as imperial ancestor received greater prominence as temples were promoted empire wide, examination places were awarded solely on the basis of Taoist-texts, and a copy of the *Tao-te ching* was ordered to be in every home. As Suzanne Cahill has indicated, Taoist religious imagery penetrated the poetry of that age, supreme for poetry.² Its cynosure, Hsüan-tsung's consort, Yang Kuei-fei, was sometimes portrayed as the Queen Mother of the West, the principal female Taoist divinity. The tragic death of the princess, China's peony, and the response of poetry to it, relayed her leadership of fashion to the generation after the rebellion of An Lu-shan.

Taoism affected T'ang China at many levels. Politically, it served to sinify the half Turkish aristocracy of the north-west. It provided a clientele for the new dynasty, as T'ien-t'ai Buddhism had done for the preceding Sui. Its esteem of expertise was an encouragement to meritocracy and the origins of the mandarinat may be as much Taoist as Confucian. Its export was a strand in the T'ang creation of a network of satellites, the Sinosphere, only later Confucianized. Socially, Taoism created new forms of socia-

bility in China still dominated by kin. In particular, it promoted the doctor-patient relationship, since Taoism was, at all levels of society, a therapy. Taoism did as much or more as Buddhism for that proto-feminism which scholars have detected in the T'ang China. Its principal divinity was female, the founder of the leading Mao-shan school was a woman, there were always female adepts, and several politically active imperial princesses were Taoist nuns. Taoism was more flexible in organization than Buddhism, and this facilitated lay, female participation. Economically, while no one, to my knowledge, has tried to transpose Gernet's argument about the origin of capitalism in China from Buddhism to Taoism, Needham may not have been wrong to suppose it found its popular support among skilled city crafts people: the possessors of knack, expertise, trade secrets and arcane formulae Gunpowder, it may be remembered was of Taoist provenance. Intellectually, Taoism gave T'ang China pluralism and the opportunity for polemic: two preconditions for the life of the mind. Its chaos-cosmology, with its array of amorphous but suggestive divinities, was a categorical system which complemented Buddhist critical metaphysics on the one hand, and aniconic, mythless Confucian *belles-lettres* on the other. It was indubitably Chinese, but Lao-tzu had travelled outside China, whether as master or disciple. The Taoist religion was a good reflection of T'ang cosmopolitanism. Its demotion by later dynasties was a sign of the narrowing of the Chinese intellectual world.

Second, in Chapter 3, on the parting of the ways between Latin Christendom and Traditional China in the high middle ages, more attention should have been paid to Sung etatism. For it was a major source of both the strength and weakness of China at that time. This reassessment has been prompted by the work of Paul J. Smith and Richard von Glahn which, though focused on Szechwan, is of wider significance.³ The Sung state, unlike that of the T'ang, relaxed control of the land and in foreign policy pursued a basically defensive, non-expansionary strategy. In the commercial sector of the economy, however, and in border regions where middle strategic and tactical advantage offered, it

became more activist, especially in periods influenced by the *hsin-fa*, new laws, or New Deal, of Wang An-shih. Wang was sophisticated. Unlike his critics, indeed most later etatistes, he distinguished economic and social policies. His basic idea was state promotion of wealth to finance the costs of the in-depth defence system, whereby the stability of China was pitted against the mobility of Inner Asia. One of these costs was the importation of horses, which the *hsin-fa* sought to meet on the northwest frontiers, via monopolies of tea purchase in Szechwan, tea sales in Shensi, and salt imports to Szechwan from Shansi. In its bureaucratic entrepreneurship, as Smith call it, the Szechwan tea and horse administration developed considerable expertise in risk management, executive incentives, credit provision and creative marketing. Moreover, since its aims were expansionary and one enemy was the restrictive practices of existing plutocrats, Sung etatisme at times fostered smaller scale capitalism and so produced simultaneous growth in both the public and private sectors. The fortunate conjuncture could not be maintained. The Szechwan tea industry contracted to the Ya-chou brick tea export to Tibet via Tachienlu. The Shansi salt import was counteracted by new private wells in Szechwan. The Sung state became parasitic and was deserted by its own citizens. Far from being that paradigm of market economy portrayed by David Selbourne in his brilliant contemporary parable, Sung China was an instance of etatisme where hidden costs outweighed manifest benefits.⁴

Third, notably in Chapters 4 and 5, China in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, but also in the book generally, more attention would now have to be paid to Chinese monetary history. This is virtually a new field, since it has been refertilized by the full power of modern monetarism and post-monetarism in another major book by Richard von Glahn.⁵ Von Glahn has done for Chinese monetary documents what Fairbank did for Chinese diplomatic documents: explicate the *lanque* in which the *paroles* were written. Monetary debates, not infrequent, and shifts in policy, often radical, are for the first time made intelligible. Monetary history has replaced numismatics. For the themes

of this book, two points are particularly significant. First, in general, China's monetary impact on the other primary civilizations and in the embryonic world market, should be seen in terms of its own active monetary demand more than passive adjustment of balance of trade. China was more monetarily dominant than we had supposed. Its shift from state imposed paper under the Sung, Yüan and early Ming, to market approved silver thereafter, a retreat from etatisme, was a major event in world as well as Chinese monetary history, which had nothing to do with foreign trade. Second, in particular, the hypothesis of a passive Chinese reception of the seventeenth-century General Crisis through a diminution of silver imports from the New World, which I adopted from Chaunu, now seems contradicted by both fact and theory. No doubt the last word has not been said. Von Glahn's definition of money seems narrow for a China where imperial mints, private coinage, commodity currencies, specie various bank monies and personalized credit coexisted. Moreover, the relations of money supply, however defined, price movements, employment levels, and economic activity, are no better understood for China than for anywhere else. Nevertheless, von Glahn's message is a powerful one and must be absorbed if China's role in world history is to be better understood.

Fourth, particularly with regard to Chapter 5, more detail is now available in relation to China's contribution to another world institution: the consumerist patina. Here by consumerist is understood, not luxury, extravagance or excess, but the application of taste, fashion, discrimination and personal choice to consumption. Consumerism may be described as a materialization of mind in food, dress, shelter, utilities, information and symbolism. Recent commodity studies have added significantly to our knowledge. Robert Finlay's study has provided deeper knowledge and wider perspectives to the story of porcelain, the China-ware *par excellence*.⁶ Porcelain appeared later in China than has been supposed. As a large scale industry at Ching-te-chen, it was an instance of Denys Lombard's Sino-Islamic moment. The characteristic blue and white products, a combination of body from China and colour from Persia, were an export

speciality before being accepted as a domestic exotic. Porcelain, excellent ballast, unlike silk preferred water to land. Overseas, it figured as substitute for plate, social marker, cultural talisman and vehicle of new manners and often feminized refinement. Sugar was often its partner. Here the work of Sucheta Majumdar⁷ and its critique by Françoise Sabban have opened fresh perspectives on the technology of what was in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the growth consumerist industry. Whatever the priorities of vertical mills, triple rollers and filtration (where the problem of molasses clarification was the opposite of brine enrichment), questions of trade and exotic market preferences were involved, at least in China. As the elder Pitt declared, no one should sneer at sugar. For if enterprise was born in a salt solution, it needed a sugar culture to become adult. Medicine ran weapons a close second in surmounting cultural impediments. Clifford M. Foust's study has added valuable detail to the story of medicinal rhubarb.⁸ Its transfer to the West can now be contextualized within the current medical philosophies of Galenism. Paracelsism and Dutch empiricism, and with regard to patient demand in the struggle against high child mortality. Information remains the basis resource. Didier Gazagnadou has traced the Chinese origins and Western development of one of the most important, early information institutions: the public post, in China confined to official correspondence (though private mail firms existed) but in Europe opened to private letters by the Duke of Milan.⁹

In conclusion, generalities. The approach to world history as the emergence, following the Mongolian explosion, of diverse world institutions superordinate to two or more of the four primary civilizations still needs defence. Words and things should be distinguished. The term world history can be applied to many lines of historical enquiry. All that is claimed for ours is that it is fruitful, that it lends itself to delimitation, specialization and professionalism, that it avoids making world history the whole of history, and that it cashes out well in terms of seminar organization, class assignments and semester papers. My enumeration of

only four primary civilizations has been called in question, especially by South Asianists. In reply, I would stress the word primary: I do not intend to deny the profound originality of either Aryan or Dravidan India. An approach to world history through civilizations in this secondary sense is traditional, and still finds distinguished exponents, but it is not mine here.¹⁰ Finally, it has been suggested that I attribute too much to the Mongolian explosion and too little to the Islamic contribution to the early world institutions.¹¹ Here it is a matter of particular facts, exact chronology and detailed analysis. The Mongolian explosion, it may be accepted, produced its results because of context and circumstance, and much of those were Islamic in origin. There is room for negotiation here, especially with regard to the Mamluks and the Islamic city states of Southeast Asia.

My first edition was dedicated to the memory of Joe Fletcher, whose 'pleasant voices, your nightingales awake' still resonate. In this third edition, I would like to acknowledge my gratitude and indebtedness to another door-opener, Ted Farmer, who invited me to participate in the world history program at Minnesota in the autumn of 1997. In world history, Professor Farmer is unique, but then he should be. Born in California, educated in Cambridge, Mass, and living in the Twin Cities, he has had the best of all possible worlds.

Introduction

This book presents a history of China which, it is hoped, will be more meaningful to Western readers than conventional histories. It is a history of China not as an isolated entity but as part of the world. Its subject is China's relations with the other major centres of civilization in Western Eurasia, Africa and America, and with what will be claimed to be an emerging world system or super-civilization. This is not the whole of Chinese history, but it is the most important part for a Western reader to know. The emerging world system is of primarily Western design and make, but China has contributed more to it than is usually realized and something is missing from any picture of modern history which does not take account of this.

No other book to my knowledge covers this field. There are general histories of China: Jacques Gernet's *Le Monde Chinois*. There are histories of particular aspects of China's relationship with the outside world: Joseph Needham's famous *Science and Civilization in China* on science and technology; Edward H. Schafer's *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand* on the T'ang; John K. Fairbank and colleagues' *The Chinese World Order* on diplomacy; and Louis Dermigny's *La Chine et L'Occident, Le Commerce à Canton au XVIII^e siècle 1719–1833* on the key period of the Enlightenment. There are pioneer studies of the emerging world system: Donald F. Lach's *Asia in the Making of Europe*; Immanuel Wallerstein's *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and The Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century*; Jean Baechler's *The Origins of Capitalism*; not to speak of Teilhard de Chardin's speculations, hard to escape from when once absorbed. What there is not is a synoptic history of China's relationship to the rest of the world and its contribution to whatever world institutions there may be. This book attempts to fill that gap.

Each chapter follows the same pattern. First, a period of Chinese history will be analysed in order to compare China to the other leading centres of civilization at that time. Second, the avenues of contact between China and those centres will be explored: routes, embassies, commerce, missions, pilgrim-

ages, espionage, hearsay and rumour. Third, what travelled along these avenues will be considered: people, goods, techniques, ideas, values, pathologies, institutions and myths. Finally, the contribution of these interchanges to various kinds of world-institution – ecological, political, cultural, technological – amounting in total to an emerging world system, will be examined. A picture of China in world history will be painted, sketchy and idiosyncratic no doubt, but, it is hoped, illuminating.

A book like this necessarily uses and abuses the work of others. Since all thanks and apologies cannot be made I think it most courteous to make none, except to Professor Joseph Fletcher of Harvard who would have appreciated the need for both.

I would also like to thank Mr Desmond Brice, National Library, New Zealand, who compiled the index.