

A Concise History of China

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What does the average Westerner really know about China? Perhaps a name or two may ring a bell - Confucius, Mao Zedong. Perhaps a place or two is familiar - Shanghai, Beijing. Maybe most people have even heard of a few dynasties - like the Ming and the Qing. With China more and more in the daily news, with its borders more open to visitors, this would be the time to gain a deeper understanding of this vast, growing country and its history.

Certainly the actual history of China can hardly be considered concise. It's one of the oldest civilizations with physically supportive evidence of its existence. Remains of hominid species believed to have existed as far back as 400,000 BC have been discovered in the area China now encompasses. Yet Roberts has produced a historical reference that would fit in a suitcase and still leave room for clothes and cameras.

Further, it does a nice job. Starting with the prehistory and early history the work takes readers through a brief synopsis of the "after the 1949 revolution period." Readers will find information on both more popularly known figures such as Genghis Khan, Confucius, as well as often less well-known people like the early emperors. Readers will learn about the different dynasties, about the evolving economic and social and political changes throughout this country's and people's lengthy existence.

Additionally, there is a helpful introductory briefing of Chinese phonetics for better pronunciation of pinyin (the Romanized spelling of the language), as well as ten maps for referencing significant periods and movements—such as the route for The Long March (the 1934-35 Communist movement northward through Nationalist territory). An index is also provided for easy reference of particular points.

This work, the author acknowledges, is a synthesis of others - weightier tomes for the most part. He wisely does not try to tackle an in-depth survey of present day China. That would change both the mission as well the book's handy, compact size. In keeping the size and contents constrained, Roberts opens his pages to a broader readership. Those who pick up this book need have no previous introduction to the topic. Here they will gain a satisfactory initial exposure to the major conflicts and highlights of each period of China's known history as well as the major players throughout.

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