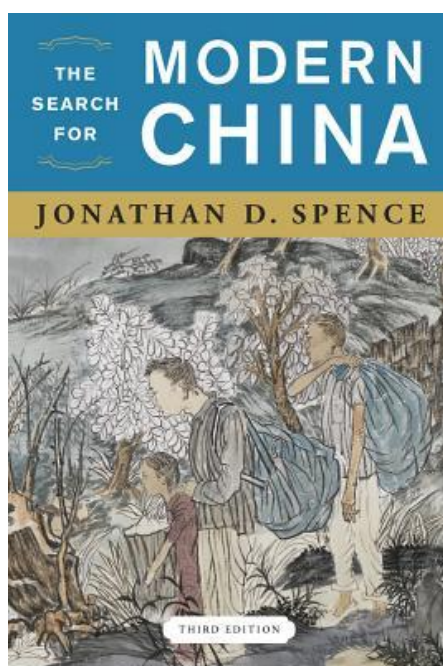




The Search For Modern China (Third Edition)

Jonathan D. Spence

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The Search For Modern China (Third Edition) Jonathan D. Spence

The leading textbook by the leading scholar.

This text, the classic introduction to modern China for students and general readers, emerged from Spence's highly successful introductory course at Yale, in which he traced the beginnings of modern China to internal developments beginning in the early 17th century. Strong on social and political history, as well as Chinese culture and its intersections with politics, this paperback is a longstanding leader in the survey course on modern China.

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From Reader Review The Search For Modern China (Third Edition) for online ebook

Will A says

This book shows how China's efforts to respond to her encounter with the imperial industrial powers from the 1840s to the 1970s were an unmitigated disaster. The Qing state made efforts to modernise the economy and military, sending students abroad, recruiting Western armaments experts, building railways, and so on. But the circumstances were impossible. Rapacious predations by foreign forces and devastating internal civil wars denied China time and space to carry out the needed development. In one pathetic incident, a new Chinese fleet was entirely and ignominiously sunk by French ships within minutes. Resistance to westernisation from inside the regime, which as a foreign conquest state was anxious about its own legitimacy, made a stark contrast with the unified determination of Japan's Meiji state-led industrialisation and military reforms. Japan went on to abuse China for decades herself. In a further disastrous outcome, China was taken over by a Stalinist psychopath whose catastrophic policies turned the mid-20th century into a waking nightmare, a man who even today is held in official honour by a regime too frightened by its own failures to permit honest discussion of the past. Only after Mao's death has China combined an era of peace with competent leadership and successful state-guided industrialisation policies. But her traumatic encounter with the imperial powers between the Opium Wars and the Japanese occupation still defines her approach to the world today: a determination to overcome the "Century of Humiliation" and maximise her power to address the world on her own terms.

Some essential books on modern and contemporary China:

Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China

Age of Ambition: Chasing Fortune, Truth, and Faith in the New China

The Party: The Secret World of China's Communist Rulers

Rebecca Radnor says

This is a REALLY well written book. First time I read it was for a course on the history of Modern China at my alma mater, Northwestern University. I think I took the course in 2010(?). And by modern they mean, post 1500 in the common era, i.e., ONLY in China is the 'Modern' era dated back to after the Fall of Constantinople. I wish more history books were this well written.

That said, I'm currently "refreshing" my knowledge: i.e., am listening to the audio file via my iphone, while getting stuff done, and I have to say the narrator is HORRIBLE (SOOOOOO glad I digitally borrowed this from the library instead of buying it from amazon). He is this really hoity toity sounding Brit who is so annoying I just want to smack him. That said, looking at reviews of his performance by others, Chinese listeners are complaining that he mispronounces ALL the Chinese words

Josh Friedlander says

Sonder is the term for the realisation that every person around you has an inner life as deep and meaningful as your own, and the explosion of complexity implied thereby. Sometimes you just realise how little you know; how absurdly deep the water goes past your shallow part of the pool. Reading a book about China is kind of the same: to realise that all of the historical and cultural knowledge you've ever accumulated mostly ignores this area (Greater China or the Sinosphere, so as not to tread on Macauan or Taiwanese toes), and that you are, in fact, basically starting from zero...

An excellent and thorough history, which flows gracefully through some four centuries with authority, but without ever becoming a drag.

Bruce says

In this monumental and detailed history of China from 1600-1990, Spence traces the many strands that have influenced the changes and development of this complex nation. He discusses China's internal conditions, its sociological and philosophical foundations and trends, and its often paranoid and contradictory relationships with the world around it. Personalities come alive, including those figures who played pivotal roles in the often confusing political history, and Spence also highlights figures whose critiques of and opposition to the directions of change were often futile at the time but influential in subtle ways over the long trajectory of national development. Major political giants like Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping are given the attention their importance deserves, although the reader is often left puzzling about the underlying personalities and motivations of such leaders. Spence's writing is clear and organized, lending clarity to a narrative that, in its unfamiliarity to many Western readers, might have proved inordinately confusing. For those unfamiliar with Chinese history over this period of time, this book provides an excellent overview on which to base further even more detailed study. For those with existing familiarity with recent Chinese history, this is an excellent and comprehensive review. For all of us, a knowledge of this subject is important if we are to understand this large and important nation. Since the narrative stops at 1990, when the work was published, the interested reader will need to supplement it with a work highlighting the further events in China during the past two decades.

Shawn says

Timeline

1122 - 1234 Manchu Jurchens take northern China "Jin dynasty"
1368 Ming Dynasty established
1550 Portugese establish presence in Macao.
1559 Nurhaci born
1570 Pirate attacks stopped in southern coast, Spain enters Manila
1572 to 1620 Emperor Wanli of Ming Dynasty
1590s Nurhacu leads tribesmen in Liaodong, eunuchs ascendent, Japan invades Korea
1601 Silk weavers strike in Suzhou, porcelin workers strike in Jiangxi
1604 Dongli Society founded, opposed corrupt eunuchs. Infamous eunuch Wei Zhongxian
1616 Nurhaci declares himself Khan of Jin Dynasty
1620 Emperor Wanli dies, grandson Chongzhen enthroned
1622 Chinese rebellions against Jin rule
1625 Nurhaci takes Shenyang
1626 Nurhaci dies, son Hong Taiji enthroned

1632 Nurhaci takes Inner Mongolia
1633 Ming generals defect to Hong Taiji
1635 Rebel Li Zicheng “The Dashing King” leads conclave of rebel leaders
1638 Rebel Li Zicheng takes Korea
1642 Epidemics across China, Manchu takes Jinzhou after ten year siege
1643 Hong Taiji dies, regent Dorgon ascends as leader of Manchus
1644 Qing Dynasty. Rebel Li Zicheng takes Peking, General Wu Sangui joins the Manchus, German Jesuit astronomer/missionary Schall von Bell arrives
1645 Manchus drive Li Zicheng to Jiangxi, installs boy Emperor Shunzi
Rebel Li Zicheng dies, Rebel Zhang Xianzhong takes Chongqing and Chengdu
Pirate/merchant Zheng Chenggong a.k.a. Koxinga sides with Ming
1647 Rebel Zhang Xianzhong killed by Manchus
1648 Prince of Gui declares Ming restoration
1650 Qing suppresses restorationists. Prince of Gui flees to Guangdong, then Burma
1659 Pirate Koxinga fails to take Nanjing
1661 Qing attacks Burma, capture and execute Ming nobles, eunuchs ousted, boy Emperor Kangxi enthroned at age 7, Oboi of the Four Regents appointed by Shunzi to oversee affairs, land displacement, Shunzi dies of smallpox
1669 Oboi arrested and deposed for overreach
1670s Galdan of the Zunghar people take Kashgar, Hami Turfan. Dalai Lama was his spiritual leader
1673 Three Feudatories rebel: Wu Sangui for Yunnan/Guizhou/Hunan and Sichuan. Shang Kexi for Guangdong and Guangxi. Geng Jimao for Fujian.
Shang Kexi falls ill, passes authority to son Shang Zhixin. Geng Jimao dies, passes authority to son Geng Jingzhong. Wu Sangui declares his own Zhou dynasty
1674 Wu Sangui attacks Hunan. Geng Jingzhong attacks Zhejiang. Shang Zhixin attacks Jiangxi.
1678 Wu Sangui dies.
1681 Emperor Kangxi defeats the Three Feudatories
1683 Emperor Kangxi sends Admiral Shi Lang to attack and defeat the Koxinga/Zhong family
Notable scholars - Wang Fuzhi under Prince Gui wrote of morality.
Huang Zongxi of the Donglin Society wrote of statecraft.
Gu Yanwu under Prince Fu wrote essays on Confucianism.
Kong Shangren wrote “The Peach Blossom fan”
1689 Treaty at Nerchinsk establishes borders with Russia and extradition procedures.
1696 Emperor Kangxi defeats Zunghar leader Galdan at Jao Modo.
1692 Emperor Kangxi’s edict of toleration for Christianity. Jesuits, Franciscans and Dominicans arrive.
1712 Emperor Kangxi’s son Yinreng arrested for regicide conspiracy. Tax reform based on headcount.
1720 Kangxi army takes Lhasa, installs puppet Dalai Lama. Cohong trade guild formed in Canton.
1721 Qing army returning from Taiwan bring back opium.
1722 Emperor Kangxi dies.
1723 Emperor Yongzheng enthroned, is considered usurper, textile worker strike, sends General Oertai against Miao peoples.
1728 General Oertai suppresses Guangxi tribesmen. Scholar Chen Menglei publishes encyclopedia.
1732 Emperor Yongzheng sends General Yue Zhongqi against Zunghars at Urumqi, fails.
1736 to 1799 Emperor Qianlong enthroned at age 25. No controversy over succession, establishes local militia called the Green Standard.
1738 Lifan Yuan (Office of Border Affairs) established to manage Northwestern issues.
1740 Examination system fails to slow corruption.
1759 Emperor Qianlong send Manchu bannerman Zhaohui to take Kashgar and Yarkand. Attempt to subjugate begs (Muslim tribal leaders). Emperor patronizes Jesuit painter Giuseppe Castiglione. Scholars of the Kaozheng (search of evidence) school re-interpret Confucian tradition with textual criticism and empiricism. “Dream of the Red Chamber”
1774 Rebel Wang Lun in Shandong province sides with Grand Canal barge pullers.

1780 Heaven and Earth society in Taiwan revolts. Muslim revolt in Gansu province.
1788 Vietnamese Le Dynasty flees to Guanxi. Emperor Qianlong attacks Nguyen usurpers and restores Le but is counter-attacked on New Year's Day. Heaven and Earth rebels in Taiwan defeated.
1790-91 Gurkhas from Nepal attack Tibet but are driven back. Corruption endemic. Emperor Qianlong rumored homosexual relationship with deputy general Heshen.
1792 King George III and British East India Company sends China Lord George MacCarthy to Peking.
1795 London Missionary Society
1796 to 1820 Emperor Qianlong's son, Jiaqing enthroned.
1799 White Lotus Society rebellion in Sichuan, Hubei, Shaanxi and Henan. Emperor Qianlong abdicates.
1813 Lin Qing cult attempts assassination in Peking.
1821-1850 Emperor Daoguang
1830 Rise of "Heaven and Earth" societies, progenitors of Triads.
1836 Emperor Daoguang bans opium, appoints viceroy Lin Zexu to enforce drug laws
1839 Lin Zexu orders cessation of foreign trade. 1st Opium War
1840 British fleet under Admiral George Eliot arrives
1841 January agreement reached with Eliot but Britain believed he exceeded authority. August: Henry Pottinger arrives, seizes Xiamen (Amoy), Ningbo, Zhoushan. Emperor Daoguang allows formation of Canton militias.
1842 British forces capture Shanghai, Zhenjiang and Nanjing. Treaty of Nanjing signed. Pottinger as first governor of Hong Kong.
1844 Treaty of Wanghia attracts US business. Rebel Hong Xinquan attracts Hakka, Zhuang and Yao peoples.
1850 Emperor Daoguang dies, Emperor Xianfeng enthroned (to 1861). Fails to suppress rebel Hong Xinquan at Thistle Mountain, Guangxi.
1851 Taiping rebellion to 1864. Anti-Manchu movements emerge. Major flooding, Kaifeng dikes break, displaces Nian peoples.
1852 Taiping rebels take Yuezhong, Hankou. Nian rebels form under Anhui warlord Zhang Luoxing.
1853 Taiping rebels take Wuchang, Anqing and Nanking, major lieutenants emerge: Yang Xiuqing and Shi Dakai. Hunanese general Zeng Guofan leads Xiang Army against Taiping.
1855 Hui peoples initiate jihad against Manchus.
1856 Indian mutiny, 2nd Opium War, British seizes Canton
1857 British and French forces at Battle of Canton
1858 Treaty of Tianjin partially 2nd Opium War with extraterritoriality, indemnity and opening more ports.
1859 Taiping rebels pick Hong Rengan as "prime minister" Tries to modernize territory under its control. British attack Dagou/Taku forts.
1860 Lord Elgin's forces enter Peking, burns Summer Palace (Yuan Ming Yuan). Mongol general Senggelinjin sent to suppress Nian rebels, encounters guerrilla tactics, kills Nian warlord Zhang Luoxing.
1861 Palace coup, Xianfeng dies. Emperor Tongzhi enthroned at age 5, China ruled by mother Cixi and uncle Prince Gong.
1862 Chinese vs. Muslims in Tonzhou and Xi'an (Shaanxi Prov)
1863 Muslims take Kunming. Lay-Osborn Flotilla arrives to try and secure Taiping situation, dispute over chain of command, sent home
1864 Qing troops attack Nanjing and defeat Taiping rebels.
1865 General Zeng Guofeng's protege General Li Hongzhang acquires modern weapons.
1866 Famine. Anti-Taiping leader Zuo Zongtang begins nation-building and re-planting projects in re-conquered areas.
1868 General Li Hongzhang defeats Nian, becomes powerful official. SS Tianqi steamship launched.
1869 Suez canal opens, trade disputes
1871 General Zuo Zongtang defeat Muslim rebel Ma Hua-Long in Jianbao.
1873 Dali retaken from Muslim rebel Du Wenxi/Sultan Suleiman "Kingdom of Pacified South a.k.a. Pingnan Guo) variant of Taiping. Suzhou retaken.
1867 Peking college opens

1870 Tianjin massacre - 16 missionaries and traders killed.
1871 Los Angeles anti-Chinese riot. Korean treaty with West.
1872 General Zeng Guofeng dies.
1975 Emperor Tongzhi dies.
1876 Wenxiong, another great statesman, dies. Return of Qing conservatives. 120 boys sent to Hartford Connecticut. Empress Cixi appoints 3 year old nephew Guangxu as Emperor.
1877 YanFu studies naval design, international law and Social Darwinism in England, translates Western works into Chinese.
1879 Japan annexes Ryuku Islands.
1882 President Chester A. Arthur signs Chinese Exclusion Act.
1884 French attacks Chinese forces at Annam (Vietnam)
1885 Rock Springs, Wyoming anti-Chinese riot.
1894 Japan seizes Korean royal family
1895 Japan seizes Weihaiwei, sinks Qing fleet. Treaty of Shimonseki with Li Hongzhong. Sun Yat Sen's Revive China Society arrested after coup conspiracy with Marxists and anarchists. Jinshi organized by Kang Youwei and nationalist leader Liang Qichao advocate for constitutional monarchy. Scholar Ti-Yong attempts to synthesize Confucian principles with Western technology.
1898 Reform movement emerges, "100 Days Reforms" modernizes exam system. Zhang Zhidong - provincial reformer taps foreign loans to develop coal, iron and steel complexes in Hubei.
1900 Boxer Rebellion. Boxer protocol
1901 New Army established, banner garrisons phased out.
1903 ZouRong studies in Japan and writes "The Revolutionary Army" at age 19.
1904 Japan defeats Russia at Lushan. New Army up to strength. October 9 Hankou bombing, revolutionaries revealed, military mutinies across China. Sun Yat Sen stays with Hawaii Triad Society. Revolutionary Alliance takes Nanjing.
1905 LuXun (pen name) from Zhejiang copper worker strike joins Sun Yat Sen's Revolutionary Alliance (Tongmeng Hui). Reformer Kang Youwei advocates for preserving Emperor Guangxu under constitutional monarchy. Empress Cixi sends constitutional study group to the West.
1906 Qui Jin, female writer dressed as man is arrested as radical teacher and plotting coup against the Qing.
1907 Mint worker strike. Manchus attempt to reign in New Army. Provincial governors executed.
1908 Street vendors strike. Empress Cixi and Guangxu dies. Emperor Puyi enthroned.
1909 Scholars of Jian Kanghu school attend 2nd International.
1910 Leader of Beiyang Army, Yuan Shikai is re-assigned to prevent coup.
1911 Mass railway policy demonstration. British opium undercut by local productions. Protests strongest in treaty ports and concession areas.
1912 Emperor PuYi abdicates, National Assembly convened, Sun Yat Sen abdicates.
1913 KuoMingTang wins election, KMT leader Song Jiaoren assassinated by Yuan ShiKai, who forces new election for Parliament, KMT is dismissed. In May, Yuan ShiKai sends General ZhongXun to attack pro-KMT military governors. President Wilson withdraws from Boxer indemnity loan consortium, remits money to scholarship fund for Chinese students.
1914 Parliament dissolved, provincial assemblies and local governments dissolves. Industrialist Charlie Soong's daughter marries Sun Yat Sen. Soong's other daughter marries industrialist HH Kong.
1915 Japan issues 21 Demands.
1916 Yuan ShiKai proclaims himself Emperor. Yunnan, Guizhou and Guangxi declare independence. Yuan ShiKai dies, is succeeded by Vice President Li Yuanhong who recalls Parliament.
1917 Pro-Qing leader General Zhang Xun enter Peiking in coup to restore PuYi in mid-June. Premier Duan QuRui uses Japanese loans. Japan gains German concession in secret treaty.
1918 China refuses to sign Versailles Treaty.
1919 Li Dazhao's study group called the May 4 Movement adopts Marxism. Drought and famine in Shandong, Henan and Shaanxi. Tianmen Square Movement is formed by scholarly elite and protests the Versailles Treaty. Pragmatists vs. ideologues. 1000 students including Zhou EnLai and Deng XiaoPeng go to Paris commune work-study program.

1920 Lenin sends Comintern Grigori Voitinski and Yang MingZhai to China, forming student groups and youth leagues.

1921 1st Plenary meeting of the Chinese Communist Party in Shanghai. Chen Duxiu elected Secretary General.

1922 CCP votes for temporary alliance with KMT. Mass migration to industrial cities, increasing labor strikes. Warlords emerge. Warlord Chen Jiongming ousted.

1923 Soviet Union backs national reunification for China as buffer against Japan. Sun Yat Sen escapes to Canton, forms military government. Comintern Borodin is sent as advisor to KMT, recommends Sun Yet Sen radicalize and rally population against warlord Chen JiongMing. "Now Russia is free from foreign domination thanks to Sovietization." Whampoa Military Academy established.

1924 Coup in Peiking. Wu PeiFu ousted. Zhang ZuoLin ascendent.

1925 Sun Yat Sen dies. Chiang Kai-Shek, Whampoa officers and National Revolutionary Army rout warlords. May 30 British fire in demonstrators in Shanghai. General strike is called.

1926 Northern Expedition against General Wu PeiFu. KMT takes Wuhan, Nanjing and Hanzhou. Manchu warlord Zhang Zuolin suppresses dissent in Shanghai and allies with former enemy Wu PeiFu to counter-balance the Soviets.

Will complete timeline when I finish the book.

Hadrian says

Only a book about China could define the modern era in the 17th century. A grand sweeping history, covering all facets of China. History, economics, politics, military events, society, the arts - a good encyclopedic overview, in a very readable style.

Unfortunately, my edition seems to end at the events of Tiananmen Square. A lot has happened since then, and I would have loved for the author to expound on the present China as lucidly as he did for the ages past.

It is also amusing to note that Deng Xiaopeng, the founder of modern Chinese state capitalism, modestly hoped for a 2% growth rate until the year 2050, with the aim of making China a moderately developed nation. Not even he, it seems, could have foreseen the tidal wave that his nation has unleashed upon world history yet again.

J.M. Hushour says

Immense and impressive, the likes of it will never be seen in this land again!

Steve says

I was first assigned this book for my Modern China history class at Tufts University. It has taken me twenty years to read the whole thing. As far as I know, this book remains the definitive account of Chinese history from the Qing (pronounced "Ching") to the Tiananmen Massacre of 1989. As such I plan to supplement

Spence with a modern work that carries on from Tiananmen. Spence wrote when China was only just emerging as an economic power, although he identified the key political, social, economic, and cultural trends at work.

I must warn any potential reader that although this work is very well written, it is a demanding book to get through. As an academic myself, I am well used to working through densely written texts. Professor Spence packs in a truly astounding amount of detailed information on political, cultural, social, intellectual, artistic, and economic history. If his prose and composition were not exemplary, this could have been an unreadable tome because of this density of knowledge.

But because it is so well written, "Search" rewards the diligent reader. If you are willing to invest the effort, you will develop an excellent general grasp of modern Chinese history.

By its nature, this is necessarily a broad account. Spence cannot spend too much time on any one topic, each of which (such as the 1966 - 1976 Chinese Cultural Revolution) can - and have - filled entire books. The reader's objective for this book must be to develop a basic understanding of the larger events in modern Chinese history. Detailed understanding of particular episodes should be left for other books.

Truth be told, readers must cycle between broad and specific histories by necessity. Developing a strong historical perspective requires reading many overlapping texts, each of whom contributes to a composite picture built up in the reader's mind.

If you are interested in understanding the rise of China in the last 40 years, this book is an excellent starting point.

Betty Ho says

No an easy read (in fact quite textbooky) but definitely a rewarding one. This book covers the history of China from the end of Ming Dynasty to 1989 Tiananmen Incident through the perspectives of politics, economics and culture. Supported by numerous research and was written without any bias, this perhaps is one of the most trusted sources of Modern China history.

Sudhang Shankar says

The ascent of contemporary China in some thirty years has fascinated and bewildered many, especially as the nation belies all western/modern ideas of the enlightenment, such as Individual Freedom, Representative Democracy. Onlookers from more liberal nations struggle to make sense of this rise that challenges the basic foundations of liberal democracies. From that perspective, Spence's book (which stops shortly after Tiananmen Square Massacre) offers some explanation behind the Sinic love for order and bureaucracy, and their justifiable umbrage at the western world.

Spence's greatest success here is how he plausibly showcases precedents for their cycles of revolutions, suppression of revolutions, further successful revolutions, reforms and further tightening of bureaucracy that forms the basis of his running theme: the Chinese may be rich and industrialized, but can only be modern if they extricate themselves from the vicious cycle of revolution and tyranny.

loafingcactus says

I have read a few books of Chinese history over the last 18 months and in general and had come to slightly understand Mao's rise to power. Anything from five years before that or earlier, totally lost. I have stood at

the graves of previous rulers and had someone explain how this one related to that one buried over there and it still didn't help.

This book got me a couple hundred more years. I still have no idea what happened BEFORE the 17th century, but from the 17th century on, I think I've got it! For anyone for whom this will be their first go at Chinese history, the difficulty is that you do not have the dynastic families that unite eras across different rulers and national boundaries the way you do in European history. When there's a new ruler, everyone's fortunes change. In fact, for the most part everyone that had gotten any kind of power dies. Even if it's the same dynasty- individuals were so powerful that some people committed suicide because their ruler died, even if their ruler's heir was the next ruler.

Now, a couple of notes about how this book differs from other history books:

First, I realized that women are written out of most history books, but I don't think I really *realized*. Because when women aren't there you don't notice that they aren't there- that's the problem. This is perhaps the first major history book that just included women in history, as if they'd been there all along. When you are used to them not being there it is quite shocking.

Second, most books on Chinese history are very emotional. Even overwrought, as I noted in my review of Jung Chang's biography of Mao. This book is exceptionally rational. Whether it is too rational I am not in a position to judge, but it puts the place of Mao and the excesses of the revolution in a very different light.

Felicity says

This was the text for a History of Modern China course I took in undergrad. From that you can infer that it's very detailed and scholarly. However, it's also intensely readable: I've reread it for pleasure in the years since graduation.

The "Modern" China of the title is in the strict sense of Modern, in this case starting in the 17th century. That may seem a long time ago, but the context it gives to more contemporary events is rich and useful. I found the patterns and trends that emerged from this book, as well as the sense of China's journey as a nation, fascinating. The insights I got from this book help me understand a little better China's stance toward the world and place in it. Highly recommended.

Matt says

This has been my first real introduction to Chinese history, read while I live my first month in Beijing. As such, I'm not really qualified to recommend it over other histories of China. I do like it a great deal though, and I suspect that it would hold up against similar books.

A history of China from the collapse of the Ming to around 2000. It is very well footnoted, index'd, and appendix'd, includes key statistics rendered as tables, many useful maps, and wonderful selections of visuals (drawings, prints, photographs) all interspersed throughout the narrative. Count me a fan of Spence's pace and level of detail, which builds gradually up into the 20th century. Some readers might be frustrated by the occasional forays into economic statisticry, or by the dozens and dozens of pinyin* names to keep track of. For me there was no point at which I felt innundated by irrelevant information. Spence makes it all seem coherent.

*I heard somewhere that now only nostalgic academics and the Taiwanese avoid pinyin. Spence falls clearly into the first category, sticking with "Peking" and "Hong Kong" among a few select others, while keeping nearly everything else in pinyin.

Tom says

Probably the best, and certainly the most popular, history of China in the modern era (i.e., post 1500 CE). Spence's prose is straightforward and clean, and his method of following individual artists, writers, or activists through a given time period to illustrate general policy acts as an engine to drive the reader through long descriptions of economic policies and trade issues. Furthermore, Spence always aims to show how the past informs the present and how patterns of history overlap and repeat. Ultimately, Jonathan Spence finds the truest expression of "Modern China" in general in the voice of the people emerging through the perpetually-centralized (and often dictatorial) government and in particular in the recent protests of 1919, 1930, 1976, 1979, 1986, and 1989.

Adrian says

It is tempting when writing a review of an epic piece of work to declare it the best within its genre, however, I will go as far as to say that this is the best comprehensive history of Modern China I have yet read, and I do not say so lightly.

While this accolade was previously given to Jonathan Fenby's very respectable work, I nonetheless feel that Jonathan D Spence has composed a very broad-ranging and ambitious work that covers a very broad time span, starting with the fall of the Ming and continuing (in the 2013 edition) to the conclusion of the HU/Wen years, and includes a complete picture of Chinese life, both in the cultural and economic spheres, aside from the very familiar political spheres.

Spence is a historian and scholar by trade, and it is evident in his work, as it exhibits academic integrity throughout, whilst being very readable. Additionally, Spence includes insights into the cultural sphere, with occasional, yet highly relevant and insightful, transgressions into cultural works, such as the brief pause in the Qianlong chapter to describe *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, and illustrate its satirical depiction of 18th Century Chinese life.

Unlike other works that tend to focus on characters and events, Spence provides a much clearer, detailed picture of the underlying fault lines and economic and social factors contributing to social change, providing many figures (often in the form of tables) and familiar comparisons to give the reader a feeling for the social and economic conditions of the time.

Spence maintains a very neutral position, and no bias is discernible (at least no to this reader), and allows the reader to make up his own mind and cast his own judgments on characters or realities presented in this work. *The Search for Modern China* is simply a masterpiece. It is ambitious, but ably succeeds, and has that rare quality of being academically first rate, yet perfectly accessible and enlightening to the lay reader.
