



The Dragon and the Foreign Devils: China and the World, 1100 B.C. to the Present

By Harry G. Gelber

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China is the most exciting rising power in the world today. The fact that China may be the next superpower attracts endless interest from all quarters?yet China is still utterly inscrutable to most outsiders. In *The Dragon and the Foreign Devils* Harry Gelber illuminates China's present by looking at the broad sweep of foreign relations in its past. From the incursions by the steppe horsemen and the Mongol conquests to the first arrival of European travelers, foreign fascination with China has followed certain patterns: curiosity, admiration, and greed for trade or territory. But, as China gradually rises from the turbulence in the wake of Mao Zedong to the economic growth and political stability of the twenty-first century, the dynamic between East and West has slowly shifted. Essential reading for anyone interested in China and its evolving relations with foreigners, *The Dragon and the Foreign Devils* breaks down the walls between East and West and shines a light on the recurring cycles of Chinese history.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The challenges for China change—Mongol horse archers in the 13th century, European gunboats in the 19th—but the response remains remarkably steady in this engaging survey of Chinese foreign relations. Historian Gelber (*Opium, Soldiers and Evangelicals*) takes a cyclical view of Chinese history. From ancient times, he contends, dynasties underwent patterns of population growth, governmental decay caused by bureaucratic sclerosis and inept emperors (exacerbated by overmighty concubines and court eunuchs), and outside military pressure. This led to chaos and conquest until a new strongman restored order. As crises and foreign incursions come and go, China's insular Confucian culture remains, and so does the sense of cultural superiority—symbolized by the prostration ritual called the kowtow, loathed by Western ambassadors—that enables China to neutralize outside influences. Even the current Communist regime, Gelber argues, is in many ways a traditional imperial dynasty, with foreign policy interests similar to those of the past. The author also assesses China's shifting image in foreign eyes, as either a model of sophisticated order or a cesspool of backward despotism. Gerber is a bit sketchy on the premodern period; his account comes into its own as a lucid, insightful narrative history of China's evolving place in the modern, Western-dominated world order. Maps. (May)

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From [Booklist](#)

A survey of China's foreign relations, Gelber's narrative discusses China's rulers over millennia. Their realm was the civilized world; beyond were the barbarians. This worldview prevented the Chinese from regarding foreign relations as interactions between nominally equal sovereignties; instead, the ruling dynasty compelled obeisance from bordering peoples. Gelber ably relates this process, the sense of cultural superiority behind it, and an emperor's power to impose relations, from the first unification of China by the Qin in 221 BCE to China's tumults of the twentieth century. Gelber presents these notions, associated with xenophobia, as deep continuities in Chinese history, and dynamically illustrates them through the threats a dynasty confronted on its borders, such as nomadic Mongols. The protracted nineteenth-century decline of China's final Qing dynasty and territorial encroachment upon China dominate the latter half of this fluent text and, argues Gelber, inform China's contemporary approach to foreign affairs. With maps, illustrations, and sidebars about the kowtow and Mao, Gelber lends a comprehensible structure to the vastness of Chinese history. *Gilbert Taylor*

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Review

“Gelber's skill as a journalist combines with his scholarly depth and rigor to yield a book which is accurate, relevant, sharply focused, logically argued, and very readable.” *?Robert O'Neill, Oxford University*

“As I read through Dr. Harry Gelber's latest book on China, I became increasingly convinced that it would be the ideal textbook for any college course on the subject. The prose is elegant and clear, the information is comprehensive, and the book is eminently readable.” *?Dean Schulz, Boston University*

“A fluent and thorough, though understandably brief, survey of Chinese history. ...Gelber makes solid work of describing China's past and suggesting what those consequences might be. A readable, sturdy overview, worthy of shelving alongside Joseph Levenson and Franz Schurmann's *China: An Interpretive History*.”

?Kirkus Reviews

“This is a grand historical review of China and its relations with the outside world, starting with the earliest record of Chinese civilization and then covering the rise and fall of the dynasties, the communist revolution, and the current turn to reform and pragmatism. By treating China's relations with the outside world as his constant guiding theme, Gelber is able to give a distinctive twist to the standard history. Anyone who has read that history will find a new dimension in Gelber's telling of the story. He enlivens his account by describing in some detail the competition among the "foreign devils" to get the better of China, driven by strong commercial interests. Gelber's China, meanwhile, is not an isolated and introspective place but rather a society that is responsive to international currents.” *?Foreign Affairs, May/June 2007 issue*

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Randy Anderson:

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