

Immanuel C. Y. Hsu. *The Rise of Modern China*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990. Pp. xxxi, 971. Cloth, \$35.00.

It has been more than twenty years since the first edition of Immanuel C. Y. Hsu's classic text on China's rise since the early Ch'ing dynasty, yet the book has remained almost unchallenged throughout that entire period. In fact, only recently with the publication of Jonathan Spence's *The Search for Modern China*, did serious students looking for a truly sophisticated and comprehensive overview of modern China even have an alternative.

And China has changed enormously in those twenty years. In 1970, when the first edition appeared, the Cultural Revolution had hardly played itself out. Subsequent editions took on the enormous challenge of narrating and making sense of a Chinese revolution that wrenched itself back and forth between Maoists of the Cultural Revolution and the followers of Deng Xiaoping. This last edition, published within months of the Tiananmen Square crackdown, nevertheless successfully attempts a serious effort to explain the crackdown and to put it into the context of modern China's historical ambivalence regarding both the West and various alternative forms of economic planning. In that effort, as with the material dealing with China as early as the seventeenth century, Professor Hsu's text remains a gold mine of information and clarity.

Despite the above, *The Rise of Modern China* does pose some serious problems for the classroom instructor. Two issues are most fundamental: (1) the retention of the Wade-Giles transliteration system in an academic world clearly turning toward Pinyin makes the later chapters on recent China clearly out of "sync" with the other published materials students might be drawn to, thus creating unnecessary problems; (2) the very length of the book makes it a problem for many undergraduate academic settings, especially when the instructor might be anxious to assign additional readings. Nevertheless, a two-semester course on modern China would not have the same problems with the size of the work. Although not all instructors will be able to use the book as a classroom text, *The Rise of Modern China* will continue to be one of the very best resources for all those who attempt to teach about modern China.

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J. M. Bourne. *Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918*. London and New York: Edward Arnold, 1989. Pp. xi, 257. Cloth, \$49.95; paper, \$14.95.

"War," said Thomas Paine, "involves in its progress such a train of unforeseen and unsuspected circumstances that no human wisdom can calculate the end." History is replete with examples of wars that didn't exactly go as planners planned, but one conflict above all, the "Great War" of 1914-1918, has been responsible for our contemporary fear of the "unforeseen and unsuspected circumstances" of war. The short, heroic, victorious war that most Europeans foresaw in August, 1914, became an unimaginable tragedy that buried a generation in the mud of the western front. It is, therefore, not surprising that books on World War I continue to flow from the presses.

John Bourne's *Britain and the Great War* is a recent addition to the flood, and a very good book. The writing is literate; the scholarship thorough (Bourne makes full use of the most recent literature on the war); and the judgments controversial, convincing, and even entertaining. Bourne's compact style and knack for pithy *obiter dicta* (reminiscent of the work of A. J. P. Taylor) make the book a pleasurable reading experience.

Front and center in this study is the British army, for, as the author notes, the Great War marked the first time "Britain put a truly national army into the field . . . and it was the only time in which that army bore the principal share of the military burden." And it was the creation of that army and the struggle in which it participated, that served as "the mechanism by which British government, politics and economic life and national values were changed." The theme is of Homeric scope, but within the compass of slightly over 200 pages Bourne covers the military history of the war, the



organization, planning and management of the war by the politicians and generals, and the impact of the war on British values and economic life.

Bourne provides the reader with a valuable overview of a society at war, but he does more. This book should prompt many teachers and scholars to rethink some of their traditional positions on World War I. Bourne states, rightly I think, that World War I "is still overwhelmingly seen as pointless, mismanaged and futile." It seemed "at best a mistake, the result of bungling and miscalculation by 'small men in great places.'" It is these impressions, at least in the context of the British experience, that he attempts to counter, and, in general, he is successful.

To Bourne, the reasons for Britain's entry into the war are more sane (preserve the empire, the source of Britain's power); her generals (especially Haig) more competent; and her strategy more reasonable than conventional wisdom allows. Throughout the book Bourne reassesses, reevaluates, and revises with confidence and good sense. He punctuates his generalizations with arresting anecdotal details that provide glimpses of the personalities behind the decisions. Yet, as successful as Bourne is in prompting us to rethink the history of 1914-1918, his is not an attempt to create the impression that World War I was just an earlier version of the "Good War." He admires the soldiers who "gave their lives . . . their posterity . . . their peace of mind . . . their youth," but he never tries to present the war as other than what it was: a tragic cataclysm that slaughtered thousands and changed the face of Britain forever.

This book, in sum, is an excellent choice for those, especially teachers, seeking a brief, comprehensive treatment of Britain at war. In appropriate courses, students too would find the book interesting and informative. It is illustrated and includes a number of useful maps. There is no bibliography *per se*, but the first footnote of each chapter contains a list of suggested readings.

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**Alan Wood.** *Stalin and Stalinism.* London and New York: Routledge, 1990. Pp. xvii, 68. Paper, \$8.95.

**Edward Acton,** *Rethinking the Russian Revolution.* London and New York: Edward Arnold, 1990. Pp. 229. Cloth, \$49.50; paper, \$13.95.

Written by two English scholars—Edward Acton is a Lecturer in Russian History at the University of Manchester and Alan Wood is his counterpart at the University of Lancaster—both works are intended for undergraduate students. While the two books share a common audience, they are very different.

Acton's work is an extended historiographical essay that focuses exclusively upon several key problems surrounding the events of 1917. Its purpose is to synthesize for undergraduate students the major traditional historical interpretations, both western and Soviet, of the Russian Revolution; more specifically, it addresses the pivotal questions of how and why the Russian Revolution erupted in February, 1917, why it took the course it did and ultimately, in October, 1917, resulted in the victory of V.I. Lenin and the Bolsheviks. In addition, the Acton book aims to show undergraduate students how historical interpretations rely upon primary source material and how interpretations evolve over time, given the availability of new evidence and new ways and methods of interpreting old evidence. Moreover, Acton presents a clear and detailed treatment of three traditional and established historical perspectives on the Russian Revolution, i.e., the liberal, the Soviet (or Marxist), and the "libertarian," as well as the more recent revisionist approach. The latter represents a shift away from traditional emphases upon political factors, "great men" or elites, and deterministic viewpoints to an emphasis upon the social dynamics of the Russian Revolution. Recent revisionist studies concentrate, accordingly, on the masses and view the Russian Revolution as a "revolution from below." Overall Acton's summaries and analyses of the respective viewpoints on the Revolution are balanced, concise, and up-to-date, although some very recent Soviet and western work is, understandably, not included. The book is well done, but it does presuppose a knowledge of the events of 1917 and some