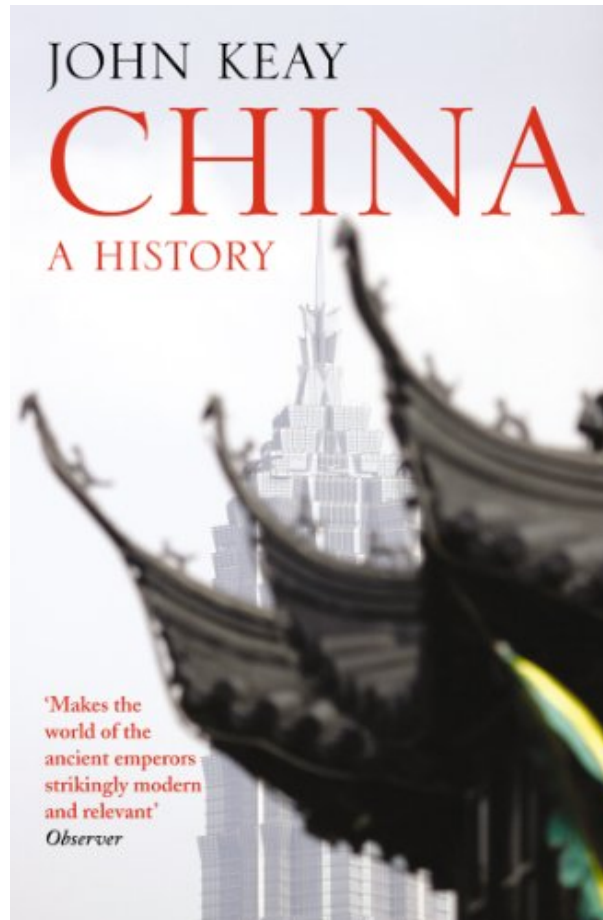
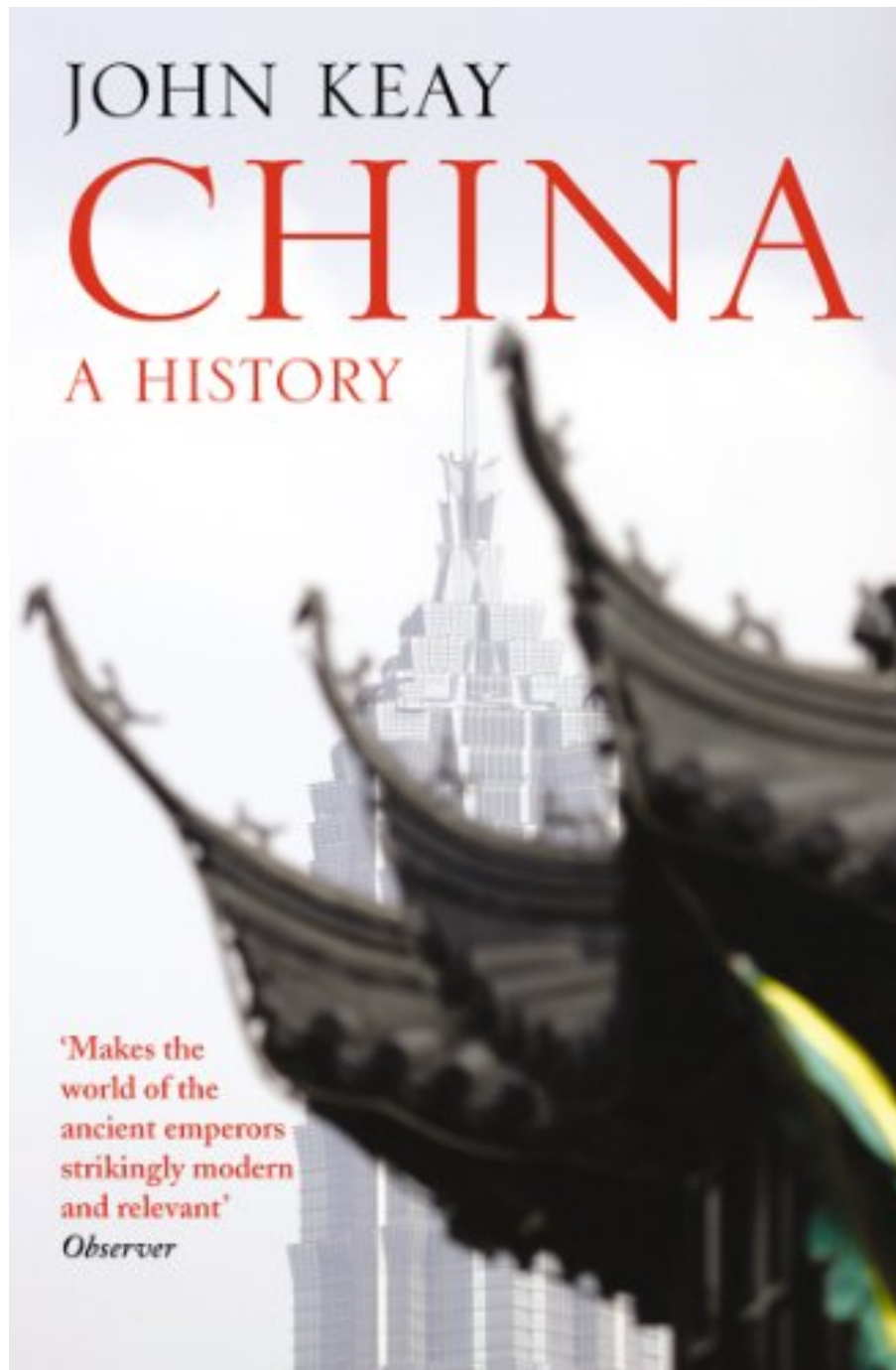


CHINA: A HISTORY BY JOHN KEAY



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Review

Library Journal

“Without sacrificing substance for brevity, Keay manages to illustrate China’s history very much as a narrative... Readers already interested in, or wishing newly to embark upon, Chinese history will adore this book. Highly recommended.”

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About the Author

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Not a bad intro, but take it with a grain of salt

By Haotian

Firstly, the author should be commended for even attempting to condense such a vast and complex subject as the history of China into a single volume. On the whole, it is an accessible account which will give an introductory understanding of many parts of China's history.

However, the book gives the impression that the supporting research was done in a great hurry, and contains errors, inconsistencies, and a number of sensational conclusions, some of which are not supported by sufficient evidence. It was therefore little wonder to me when I learned that the author is, in fact, a journalist and not a historian. It seems as though the author has attempted to make some attention-grabbing statements in a clumsy attempt to turn Chinese history on its head.

I will give just three examples of the kind of sloppiness that I have referred to. 1) One theory, which is entirely undeveloped apart from a small amount of hypothesising on the part of the author, is that the Great Wall did not prevent northern tribes from entering China and was never designed for this purpose. In stating this, the author appears unaware of the extraordinary career and accomplishments of Qi Jiguang, perhaps China's greatest military leader of the Ming (or any other) period. He built, and successfully defended the Great Wall against all comers. Although it was never intended to be an entirely defensive structure, and although no one other than Qi Jiguang was able to defend China's northern frontier as he did, this hardly validates the author's sensational theory 2) the portrayal of Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-Shek) as a collaborator in the Long March of the CCP ignores the fact that he hated the CCP, wanted it to be eradicated from the face of the Earth, and had expended an enormous amount of political and military effort in attempting to defeat them. For Jiang to sit back and watch the Long March, while "shepherding" the CCP to its new northern base under duress from the Soviet Union, runs counter to everything that we know about Jiang's struggle with the CCP 3) the author states that Jesuit missionaries in China attempted a top-down conversion of the Chinese empire to Christianity, which is a misconception of the kind that you would expect from someone who only reads headlines - while the Jesuit missionaries spent substantial efforts attempting to win imperial recognition and support, the vast majority of their work was focussed on the Chinese countryside.

I readily admit that I am no expert on any period of Chinese history. However, the fact that even someone in my position can easily see some of the flaws in the author's arguments only shows how circumspect the reader needs to be in approaching this book. I would guess that someone who really is an expert on Chinese history would find many more flaws.

This book is useful as a basic outline of Chinese history, but is flawed in at least some, probably many, of its details, and needs to be supplemented with other sources to gain a more balanced and informed view of the topics covered.

77 of 86 people found the following review helpful.

A very readable account

By Seth J. Frantzman

John Keay is correct in observing that Chinese history is often impenetrable to all but the specialist. Yet it is an important and ancient history and one many people would like to know more about. So he has set out to do for China what he did for India in *India: A History* and make it accessible to an English speaking audience.

THis is a well written account of a fascinating country and its people. It does what few books do which is to ignore the present and instead give the past a fair shake in terms. There is no telescoping the narrative so that

the last hundred years gets half the book, instead the last hundred years of Chinese history receives just a few dozen pages, giving the reader the correct impression that China's past is as important as her present.

In general the book also gives the reader a great deal of handy charts to keep track of dynasties and people. A very well written account,

Seth J. Frantzman

51 of 58 people found the following review helpful.

Complete, descriptive, objective

By Sid Sheng

I bought and read this book because I am Chinese but know nothing about Chinese history (having grown up in Australia), so I was probably always going to enjoy this book.

After reading this book, I've learnt that China's history is very complicated, but Keay does a fantastic job to provide objectively a good picture of each era. He is very descriptive on the important moments in Chinese history (it's impossible to fit every moment of Chinese history in a book of this size), so after reading this book, the reader is likely to remember these important points in Chinese history.

The maps are also very helpful to get an idea of all the warfare that was going on. I thought more maps would have even been better, and more pictures/portraits/photos (e.g. of important emperors and other leaders) would have also been good as it puts a face to a name.

I am not a frequent reader, but I can still tell that Keay chooses his words carefully and skillfully. I had to reach for the dictionary plenty of times. Hopefully someone with a better vocabulary base can appreciate this aspect more than myself.

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