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# Broadening the Horizons of Chinese History

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Huang, Ray: *Broadening the Horizons of Chinese History*. (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), viii + 274 pp., pbk \$ 22.95. ISBN 0-7656-03438-9.

Ray Huang's latest book is an anthology composed of six essays, one address, and an outline all of which were either published or delivered from 1982 to 1995. Together they present Huang's argument for a broad treatment of modern Chinese history that pushes its origins back to the Ming dynasty, seeing the Ming/Qing period as the third in a sequence of imperial systems that each possessed characteristics unique enough to justify treating them as functionally distinct. The Qin/Han and the Sui/Tang/Sung eras each stand apart: the first forged the centralized, bureaucratic state that ruled China for two millennia, and the second saw China achieve heights of political, economic and cultural development that were unmatched anywhere in the world until the 18th century. During the Ming/Qing period, China took a "gigantic step backward," its failure both to develop modern industry and to deal with foreign pressures being caused by structural characteristics that prevented it from developing the administrative, commercial and legal institutions necessary to make China "mathematically manageable."

Mathematical manageability is a concept central to Huang's thesis which, unfortunately, he does not develop with clarity or precision. The context in which he uses the term leaves one with a rough sense that he is referring to a situation in which not only are state and private resources understood in quantitative terms but legal, commercial and administrative structures are in place that make possible their rational, purposeful and systematic employment in the service of national goals. Such a state of affairs was reached by the late 17th century in Venice, the Dutch Republic, and England; and Huang devotes approximately one quarter of his discussion to the development of capitalism in each, noting that in each case the institutions of capitalism became the organizational foundations of state and society. The enforcement of legal protections for property rights and widespread acceptance of notions of trust appear to be paramount in his thinking, but three other factors are singled out as necessary for and symptomatic of capitalism: 1) a wide extension of credit; 2) impersonal management; and 3) the pooling of service facilities by individual firms.

None of these elements were present in China before the 20th century, and it is Huang's argument that as a consequence China remained essentially ungovernable. Lacking the building blocks to create a society that was mathematically manageable, China remained, in relative terms, backward. Salient features of the late traditional state system that precluded modern development included weak and inefficient administrative organs and a budget that was too small to provide the Chinese state the resources necessary to deal with its increasingly complex problems. In addition, Chinese society was integrated by cultural links and strict social discipline rather than laws, and there never developed a practice of protecting property rights. Efforts by Chinese historians to prove that there were "sprouts of capitalism" as early as the Ming dynasty are flawed, Huang claims, because their supporting evidence was exceptional, uncoordinated, and irrelevant since it did not lead to systematic changes. He acknowledges that the Qing dynasty witnessed the development of new revenue sources and financial institutions such as the Shansi banks, but he minimizes their importance by nothing

that they did not "substantially alter the outlook" of Chinese during the late imperial period.

He sees the traditional Chinese state system as a paradoxical combination of intense concentration of power at the center with an administrative structure that established only a minimal presence at the local level. Social organization was sustained not through reliance upon the rule of law but by the perfusion of an ethical code that sustained doctrinal coherence but failed to lead to legal structures capable of mediating between diverse economic interests. The basic formula of state economic policy was for the government to foster an economy based on small self-cultivators, and its preference for economic egalitarianism left it ill prepared to improve production techniques, increase farm wages, and mobilize capital for investment in industry and commerce.

The inability of the state to organize and manage its finances rationally is very important to Huang because he notes that private capital formation in the West owed a great deal to the activities of governments that participated extensively in the workings of the national economy. His predictions for the future of China are hopeful because he believes that during the Communist era the state has made considerable progress toward development of rational fiscal and monetary systems capable of influencing economic development. China now has become mathematically manageable, and it seems to be following a trajectory that will lead to convergence with the West. Interestingly, he suggests that whether China continues its movement toward private enterprise or retreats toward socialism is irrelevant so long as it continues to make progress along these lines.

Readers of Huang's two popular works, *China: A Macro History* (1990, rev. ed. 1997) and *1585: A Year of No Significance* (1981), will find much that is familiar in this piece. Here as elsewhere the author summons the reader to take a broad approach which places the recent past in the context of long term trends and compares it to the transformation of the West. In doing so he demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the institutional and structural elements of Chinese society. It is worth noting, however, that this book is not for the uninitiated. At times it assumes a familiarity with both Chinese and European history that places it beyond the reach of those unfamiliar with the territory it covers. In addition, while each chapter adds something new to the discussion, there is quite a bit that is redundant. For a clear presentation of Huang's ideas this would not be the best place to start. Perhaps as M. E. Sharpe's editors suggest on the book's back cover, the best way to appreciate this interesting work is as a "sourcebook and teacher's guide" to some of Huang's other writings.

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Tanner, Harold M., *Strike Hard: Anti-Crime Campaigns and Chinese Criminal Justice, 1979-1985*, Cornell East Asia Series, 104. (Ithaca: East Asia Program, Cornell University, 1999), x + 253 pp., pbk \$ 17.00. ISBN 1-885445-04-0.

The author (History, University of North Texas) says a Hong Kong magazine reported that Deng Xiaoping was inspired to get tough on crime in 1983 by himself being the target of an attempted robbery "as he rode through the hills