
Anyone who has tried to find a comprehensive list of reference works on any aspect of modern China knows just how piecemeal, frustrating, and time-consuming the process can be. James Cole is attempting to ease the process somewhat, for scholars and librarians, by compiling a bibliography of reference works published mainly during the thirty-year period from 1964–1994. Now that the first section, organized by subject headings, has been published, we can appreciate the utility and monumental scope of his work. This first section contains some 12,200 entries, arranged alphabetically by title within subject headings, ranging from “Abbreviations” to “Youth and Youth Movements” (there are approximately four hundred subject headings), that describe reference works on modern China in Chinese, Japanese, and Western languages. This is the first of an eventual three-part bibliography; section 2 will be organized by “Persons” and section 3 by “Places.”

Cole intends his work to supplement three earlier research tools that focus on modern China: Berton and Wu’s *Contemporary China: A Research Guide* (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1967), Nathan’s *Modern China, 1840–1972: An Introduction to Sources and Research Aids* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, 1973), and his own *Updating Wilkinson: An Annotated Bibliography of Reference Works on Imperial China Published since 1973* (New York:
James H. Cole, 1991). The volume under review here was compiled specifically to pick up where Berton and Wu’s research guide left off since they confined their coverage to items published through 1963. In the spirit of extending rather than replacing the earlier guides, Cole in this bibliography also advises his readers to consult all three of the previous works since he has not included any references that have been cited in these other three.

Cole also acknowledges the importance of online union catalogs such as RLIN (Research Libraries Information Network) and OCLC (Online Computer Library Center) to scholars of modern China and to the completion of this bibliographic project. But these online tools also have some deficiencies, especially regarding subject searches, and I found Cole’s discussion of this issue informative and most helpful. For example, he points out that online catalogs do not contain any annotation of content, their subject categories are sometimes nonintuitive, and there are usually a limited number of subject categories assigned to any given item. As anyone knows who researches and writes on China, for all of their limitations these online catalogs are indispensable. I know that I call on OCLC’s WorldCat several times a day to verify publication and library-holding information for items I am using or wish to use in a given writing project.

The discussion of computer-based research aids gives rise to two questions: first, how should printed bibliographies be integrated with these computer-based tools, and second, are printed bibliographies and research aids still relevant and useful? I have to admit that I have relied less and less on printed works in the last few years, opting for the more convenient and seemingly more thorough computer-based tools at my disposal, such as WorldCat. Cole’s discussion answers these questions effectively, and a summary he makes toward the end of this discussion would be well worth providing to any senior undergraduate or beginning graduate student. “A well-designed printed bibliography, annotated and arranged under detailed subject headings, is the tool of choice for discovering the existence of a previously unknown item and learning what it contains. An online library union catalog, with its frequently updated holding information, is the tool of choice for locating the desired item” (pp. xviii–xix). Finally, Cole includes a short discussion on terminology that researchers will find useful and that could also be excerpted as a teaching aid for student use. For example, he tells the reader how PRC publications differentiate between terms like jindai, xiandai, and dangdai—very useful information for those of us who began our research careers in premodern China and who have since moved into the modern era.

With some four hundred separate subject headings, it is obvious that Cole has tried to be as comprehensive as possible. It will not be possible for me to describe in any detail here the full scope of his listings, but this work will certainly be an essential tool for virtually anyone conducting research in any field related to modern China. To give just a brief example of a partial list of subject categories...
from his Table of Contents, we have, in order, “Energy,” “Etiquette,” “Factions,” “Finance,” “Fine Arts,” “Fishing,” “Food,” and “Foreign Economics.” And, of course, all the major themes of modern China are covered extensively. For example, three separate subject headings begin with the term “Communist”: “Communist Base Areas and ‘Liberated Areas’” (149 entries, pp. 157–169), “Communist Movement and Other Chinese Revolutionary Movements” (379 entries, pp. 169–201), and “Communist Party” (397 entries, pp. 202–236). Since I am not a specialist in Chinese Communist Party history I cannot provide an informed opinion on the coverage in these categories, but there appears to be ample information here to help most researchers, even those familiar with the field.

One field of research that I do know somewhat better concerns national minority issues, and here, too, Cole’s bibliography provides an impressive set of data. Reference works that pertain to any aspect of modern China’s national minorities are found in one of five subject categories: “Anthropology and Ethnology” (87 entries, pp. 43–50), “Language and Linguistics: Dialects and Minority-Nationality Languages” (110 entries, pp. 616–626), “Minority Nationalities” (200 entries, pp. 775–792), “Society: Social Conditions, Social History, Social Welfare, and Social Work” (119 entries, pp. 1009–1018), and “Sociology” (28 entries, pp. 1018–1021). There are also undoubtedly entries scattered in other subject categories that also pertain to China’s national minorities, but these are the most informative categories. By using these five subject categories together, I was able to find a massive amount of information on publications and library holdings that pertain to this issue that would otherwise have been difficult at best to locate by simply conducting an online search. Locating specific information is also made easier for the reader because of Cole’s extensive cross-indexing and the author and title indexes. For example, while any single entry is fully annotated only once, it may be listed under several different subject headings with a note “For annotation see. . . .” And Cole provides an essential “Character List for Chinese and Japanese Titles” (pp. 1089–1278), organized by entry number. My preference would have been to have the Chinese and Japanese characters included in the entries rather than in a separate list at the end, but I did find it easy to locate a given title in his list.

Another area most researchers of modern China would find helpful are archival and library holdings, and here, too, Cole provides a wide range of entries that include information on universities, national libraries, public libraries, and provincial libraries in the PRC, Taiwan, Japan, Hong Kong, Macao, Europe, and the United States. He has arranged these entries under three separate subject headings: “Archives” (235 entries, pp. 60–81), “Library and Archival Catalogs: Individual Institutions: Guides to Individual Libraries” (150 entries, pp. 654–698), and “Library and Archival Catalogs: Multiple Institutions: Union Catalogs” (166 entries, pp. 698–717). All of the PRC provinces are covered to a greater or lesser
degree, and there are some surprising entries such as the catalog of periodical holdings of the Jiangxi Shifan Daxue library (item 63.63–1, p. 674).

But, as Cole admits in his introduction, his bibliography is far from being truly comprehensive. This is not surprising given the sheer number of reference works on modern China that undoubtedly exist in libraries around the world. Cole himself notes that his coverage of Russian-language items is minimal. Somewhat more surprising is that no Korean-language materials or works by Korean scholars are included in the bibliography. This is a fairly serious omission in a work of this magnitude, and it is a pity that Cole chose not to include such works. It would be most helpful indeed to know what exists in Korean national and university libraries. Even more helpful would be to have a sense of what our Korean colleagues are producing in terms of reference works on modern China. Perhaps this gap can be corrected in his forthcoming two sections?

And of course there will always be individual works that will have been overlooked in compiling a bibliography of this magnitude. These range from the picayune to the more important, depending on the interests and knowledge of a given reader. For example, there were some specific reference works that I was surprised to find were not included in any of the categories that included archives and library holdings. For example, one of the most important archival holdings in the PRC for modern China is the Jiangsu Provincial Archives, and a guide to that institution’s holdings was published in 1994. Even though it falls within the thirty-year window Cole set for his bibliography, it was not included in any of the relevant subject categories. Another important archive is the Yunnan Provincial Archive, a guide to which was published in 1997, but this also was not included in Cole’s bibliography. These are unfortunate omissions since these archival guides are indispensable to anyone who plans to use these holdings for research. A few omissions in the subject categories related to China’s national minorities also surprised me. For example, neither the most important Uyghur-English dictionary, now in print in the United States, nor a Chinese-romanized Uyghur dictionary published in the PRC, both well within Cole’s time frame, were included, and the annotation for the one Uyghur dictionary that he does include is sparse.

These are, of course, for the most part minor omissions when considering the overall scope of Cole’s bibliography, and are far outweighed by its many strengths. One area where it is especially strong, and will be of immense use to scholars and librarians of Asia, is in its coverage of Japanese-language works and library holdings. Cole has consulted all of the important Japanese library holdings and catalogs, and has included numerous entries on Japanese works in an attempt to “impress upon all China scholars what historians and researchers in the humanities have long recognized: the importance of Japanese scholarship on China and the need to take it into account” (p. xix). This is a laudable goal, and having
this bibliography on hand should certainly encourage more non-Japanese China
scholars to engage with Japanese scholarship in their field.

James Cole has provided researchers of modern China with an indispensable
tool. Not only does he extend the chronological coverage of earlier research
guides, but his bibliography is also much more comprehensive than any other
printed research guide to date. His annotations also provide a useful counterpoint
to online catalogs and bibliographies and, used in tandem with these resources,
should certainly make accessible new resources for all of us who work on modern
China. Publication of the final two sections of his bibliography will only increase
the utility of this work to scholars and librarians alike, and they should all be part
of any serious library’s basic reference collection.

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cializing in Yuan dynasty social history and the history of the Yunnan Huizu
community.

NOTES

1. Jiangsu Sheng Dang’anguan 江苏省档案馆, Jiangsu Sheng Dang’anguan zhinan 江苏省
档案馆指南 (Guide to the Jiangsu Provincial archives), Zhongguo Dang’anguan zhinan cong-
shu 中国档案馆指南丛书 (Beijing: Zhongguo Dang’an Chubanshe, 1994).

2. Yunnan Sheng Dang’anguan 云南省档案馆, Yunnan Sheng Dang’anguan zhinan 云南省
档案馆指南 (Guide to the Yunnan Provincial archives), Zhongguo Dang’anguan zhinan cong-
shu 中国档案馆指南丛书 (Beijing: Zhongguo Dang’an Chubanshe, 1997). Although this work’s
publication date sets it outside Cole’s time frame, he also states in his introduction that he has
included important items published as late as 2001.

3. Henry G. Schwarz, An Uyghur-English Dictionary, East Asian Research Aids and Trans-
lations, vol. 3 (Bellingham: Western Washington University, 1992); Han Wei cidian 汉维词典
623, in Cole’s bibliography for the Uyghur dictionary that he has included.