



Restless Empire: China and the World Since 1750

By Odd Arne Westad

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As the twenty-first century dawns, China stands at a crossroads. The largest and most populous country on earth and currently the world's second biggest economy, China has recently reclaimed its historic place at the center of global affairs after decades of internal chaos and disastrous foreign relations. But even as China tentatively reengages with the outside world, the contradictions of its development risks pushing it back into an era of insularity and instability—a regression that, as China's recent history shows, would have serious implications for all other nations.

In *Restless Empire*, award-winning historian Odd Arne Westad traces China's complex foreign affairs over the past 250 years, identifying the forces that will determine the country's path in the decades to come. Since the height of the Qing Empire in the eighteenth century, China's interactions—and confrontations—with foreign powers have caused its worldview to fluctuate wildly between extremes of dominance and subjugation, emulation and defiance. From the invasion of Burma in the 1760s to the Boxer Rebellion in the early 20th century to the 2001 standoff over a downed U.S. spy plane, many of these encounters have left Chinese with a lingering sense of humiliation and resentment, and inflamed their notions of justice, hierarchy, and Chinese centrality in world affairs. Recently, China's rising influence on the world stage has shown what the country stands to gain from international cooperation and openness. But as Westad shows, the nation's success will ultimately hinge on its ability to engage with potential international partners while simultaneously safeguarding its own strength and stability.

An in-depth study by one of our most respected authorities on international relations and contemporary East Asian history, *Restless Empire* is essential reading for anyone wishing to understand the recent past and probable future of this dynamic and complex nation.



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Editorial Review

Review

John Pomfret, *Washington Post*

“[A] wonderful book.... Westad upends, but ever so politely, a slew of misconceptions about China that have been concocted by his academic predecessors both in the West and in Asia.... [He shows] that the foreigners' story in China is not the monochromatic account of malevolent imperialism that has dominated the discourse in U.S. universities but a much richer and more important tale. The brilliance of *Restless Empire* is that while acknowledging the threat to China inherent in its contacts with the West and Japan, Westad also shows that they inspired and amazed the Chinese and played the critical role in the opening of the Chinese mind.”

Financial Times

“*Restless Empire* is a fascinating book and a pleasure to read. As well as providing a historical framework for understanding the behavior of modern China, it is full of interesting details and insights.... Amid the anecdotes and the broad historical narrative, Westad also offers pointed reassessments of particular episodes in Chinese history.... Another interesting angle to *Restless Empire* is its emphasis on the ambiguous impact of China's collision with imperialism.... The restless reader may want to know what all this history tells us about the modern day. Westad places current developments in an interesting historical perspective.”

Kirkus Reviews

“An astute, succinct study of modern China emphasizing overarching themes like hybrid identity and foreign influence rather than nationalism and centrality.... A fresh look at a confounding nation the West has not yet figured out.”

Publishers Weekly

“[A] savvy history.... Westad manages to compress a vast and complex history into a well-paced narrative that helps readers understand China's growing centrality in international affairs.”

Booklist, starred review“A superb story of China's historically ‘schizophrenic’ relationship with the outside world.... [A] compelling, expansive account. Westad has provided readers with both a remarkable and timely glimpse behind the curtain that is required reading for anyone interested in Chinese political history and economic development and the future of China's position in the international community.”

Martin Jacques, author of *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order*

Vancouver Sun

“[A] timely new book.... Westad takes us on a fast but sure-footed...gallop over the heavy ground of China's relations with the outside world since the beginning of the serious incursions by foreign powers, especially the British.... Westad has produced an entertaining, fulsome and useful addition to the deluge of literature on China.”

Charleston Post & Courier

“Understanding China's cultural, commercial and diplomatic relationships to the U.S. and the rest of the world is an important task. That's why this book is so useful. For China, perhaps more than any other country, understanding its past is key to understanding its present and future.... Westad constructs his narrative from sources that include other scholarship, personal anecdotes and primary research, but with an accessible style. *Restless Empire* is a great example of macro-history written for the general reader.”

Global Asia

“[*Restless Empire*] is a richly detailed, elegant meditation on China's search to define its role in the world, and answer that elemental question: What is China?... Westad masterfully relates China's vertiginous 19th-century decline, restless 20th-century experimenting with modernity and its dizzying resurgence today.... A learned history.”

The Guardian, Best History Books of 2012

“[A] fine example...of the way history can begin to make sense of [China] for an outsider.”

Ian Johnson, New York Review of Books

“A Sinologist who has written widely and lucidly on the cold war, Westad's *Restless Empire* is a rich history of the past 250 years of Chinese foreign policy.”

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

“A revisionist attempt to break up tomes of statecraft and statesmen into histories of missionaries, businessmen, coolies, revolutionaries and scholars. *Restless Empire* is a personal, anecdotal and humanistic approach to history that uses the single common thread of China's turbulent past to tie 250 years of history together—her people.... Westad is foremost a good storyteller, the most important qualification of a good historian.... Compelling stuff.”

Library Journal

“[A] nuanced interpretation of the history of China's foreign relations.... This is essential reading for students of modern Chinese history and for those interested in China's growing role in world affairs. Westad's ability to lucidly explain a complex subject makes this an excellent introduction.”

Stephen R. Platt, author of *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom*

“Odd Arne Westad's *Restless Empire* is an authoritative and lucid history of China's foreign relations from the peak of the Qing dynasty in the eighteenth century to the present day. Anyone seeking to understand the role China may play in our future world should start with this book.”

Jung Chang, author of *Wild Swans* and co-author of *Mao: The Unknown Story*

“Written by one of the most distinguished scholars on China, this book brings clarity and insight into complex historical issues.”

Jonathan Spence, author of *The Search for Modern China*

“Westad's *Restless Empire* is thorough, fast-moving, and consistently clear. It gives an excellent introduction to the vagaries of China's foreign relations over the last 250 years.”

Frank Dikötter, author of *Mao's Great Famine*

“An essential guide to modern China's often violent encounter with the rest of the world.”

Sunday Telegraph

“Westad starts with an important piece of mythbusting, arguing strongly against the idea that China has been an inward-looking society closed to the rest of the world.... Westad is particularly acute on the Cold War period, using impressive documentation to argue that China's relationship to the rest of East Asia was not just communist, but Confucian in the ties that Mao nurtured with his ideological 'younger brothers' such as Kim Il-sung and Ho Chi Minh.... [Westad] makes[s] poignantly clear the obstacles to China becoming a global leader.”

Commonweal

“Westad's clear account is extraordinarily useful, both for the context in which he puts it and for the use he makes of recent scholarship.... I'm unaware of any other work of this chronological sweep that replaces the old 'Western impact on China' treatises so well with the findings of modern scholarship.”

Literary Review

“A lucid and engaging book.... This fine survey is the best guide to appear yet on the knotty entanglements of China's pasts and futures.”

About the Author

Odd Arne Westad is a professor of international history at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He has held visiting fellowships at Cambridge University, Hong Kong University, and New York University. Author or editor of eleven books, including *The Global Cold War*, which won the Bancroft Prize, the Harrington Award, and the Akira Iriye International History Award, Westad lives in Cambridge, England.

Users Review

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