

## Book Reviews

**A History of Polar Exploration.** L. P. Kirwan. Norton, New York, 1960. x + 374 pp. Illus. + plates. \$4.95.

**Sverdrup's Arctic Adventures.** T. C. Fairley. Longman, Green, New York, 1960. xii + 305 pp. Illus. + plates. \$6.

In his general history of polar exploration, Kirwan refers to a period of Scandinavian ascendancy around the turn of the 20th century. Among the modern Vikings none outranked Otto Sverdrup, whom Kirwan calls "an outstanding leader and the greatest ice pilot of his day." In *Sverdrup's Arctic Adventures*, Fairley allows the explorer to tell, in his own words, of the great expedition to the Canadian arctic, by condensing Sverdrup's *New Land*, originally published in 1904. To explain the man and his accomplishment, Fairley has added biographical information, explanatory notes, and a brief assessment of Sverdrup's significance. He has done a public service in making available one of the great stories of polar adventure.

Fairley's book might be presented as a case history illustrating Kirwan's study of polar exploration. By a miracle of compression, Kirwan has presented the story of many hundreds of years of effort to open the polar regions in less than 400 pages. He has accomplished this by emphasizing the evolution of polar exploration in its social and historical context rather than by analyzing geographical achievement and the development of polar techniques. His approach led him into the interesting field of the motives and impulses—economic, strategic, political, and personal—that lead men to risk their lives in the arctic and antarctic. Consistent with his viewpoint, but perhaps disappointing to some readers, is his treatment of the period since 1920 in summary fashion because sufficient time has not elapsed to establish historical perspective.

Kirwan, director of the Royal Geo-

graphical Society, has a certain quiet English pride. Lacking any chauvinism, unafraid to criticize his countrymen, generous in recording the achievements of other nations, the author, nevertheless, manages to keep the activities and accomplishments of Britons in the center of the stage. The same national viewpoint pervades all mention of political relationships in Antarctica.

These remarks are intended less as criticism than as a warning to the non-British reader. In compressing a mass of material into a small compass, mistakes are inevitable; Kirwan has committed very few. The volume should be on the bookshelf of everyone who is interested in polar exploration, general reader and specialist alike.

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**China.** Its people and its society and culture. Chang-tu Hu *et al.* Hraf Press, New Haven, Conn., 1960 (distributed by Taplinger, New York). xiv + 611 pp. \$10.

For those who are interested in general knowledge about China, and especially for those who teach college courses on Chinese society and culture, there has long been the need for a comprehensive volume which would give a systematic presentation of Chinese society and culture in terms of its traditional pattern and its present shape of development. Unfortunately, almost without exception, the extant books that represent comprehensive surveys of China were written in the pre-Communist period and, largely, contain pre-World War II data. Their main body of information is at least 20 years old, while China has been radically transformed in a decade of Communist rule. Some old works have undergone recent revisions, but revision to change a form that has been firmly cast has ob-

vious limitations. There are indeed many recent books on present-day China, but they are devoted mostly to one or another aspect of that country, and give the reader only a partial picture without an over-all perspective. In the light of this situation, this volume constitutes a distinctive and welcome contribution.

The comprehensiveness of the volume's contents is seen in its extensive coverage: historical résumé, geography and population, ethnic groups, linguistic systems, social organization, such social institutions as religion, family, government, economy, health and welfare, education, science and technology, art and intellectual expression, and information on mass communication, values and patterns of living, and national attitudes. All these aspects, with the exception of certain segments of the government and economy, are treated with comparisons between the traditional order and its recent transformations under Communist rule. The success of such a comprehensive treatment of a complex society with a vast population and deep historical roots is due in no small measure to the authors' unique opportunity to utilize the extensive resources of the Human Relations Area Files and the documents from the Files' subcontract projects on China. The success is due also to the fruitful use of the interdisciplinary approach by the authors, each of whom is a specialist on some aspect of China's society and culture. The volume shows a high degree of technical competence in its treatment of such subjects as ethnic groups, linguistic systems, the family, foreign relations, and education, and especially in its presentation of different facets of the Communist economy, which fills almost one-fifth of the volume. Such a task would have been extremely difficult for any single author to accomplish.

The value of the work would have been enhanced if, in the treatment of such subjects as religion and social organization, more consideration had been given to existing contributions in these fields. But as it stands, the volume has no counterpart as a work combining comprehensiveness with up-to-date information on an interdisciplinary basis, and, as such, it meets a long-felt need in the field of area studies.

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