

The ALA Guide to  
Researching Modern



# CHINA

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现代中国研究指南

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## Historical Overview of Modern China Studies in the United States

This chapter will show you:

- ★ The evolution of the field of China Studies since the nineteenth century
- ★ The effect of accessibility of information on China Studies scholarship

**W**e can trace the beginning of China Studies in the United States back to the work of missionaries in the nineteenth century. American missionaries started to arrive in China around the middle of the nineteenth century. Some of the missionaries spent decades living in China and produced a large amount of literature about China, in the form of newsletters, diaries, personal letters, and memoirs. Some of the missionaries compiled dictionaries and published introductory books about Chinese history, culture, and people. Thanks to these materials, people in the United States for the first time in history started to have some idea about the real China, instead of just envisioning some remote, mysterious place on the other side of the earth. These publications also laid the foundation for later China Studies scholarship, and they continue to be interesting to scholars even today because they record and bear witness to the most significant changes in Chinese history, such as the collapse of the centuries-old dynastic system and the first encounters between China and the West.

While the missionary materials are valuable historical accounts of what life in China was like at that time, they can also be very much biased. For