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British stratigraphy

F. Wolverson Cope

A Dynamic Stratigraphy of the British Isles. By R. Anderson, P.H. Bridges, M.R. Leeder and B.W. Sellwood. Pp.301. (George Allen and Unwin: Hemel Hempstead, UK, 1979.) Hardback £15; paperback £7.95.

APTLY titled, this book describes the evolution, over a period of about 3,000 million years, of that part of the Earth's crust occupied by the British Isles.

The past two decades have seen a revolution in geological thinking. Major factors in this have been the increasing capability to date rocks radiometrically, the study of palaeomagnetism, remarkable advances in sedimentological interpretation based upon increased knowledge of modern sedimentary processes, the exploration of sea and ocean beds and of the crust beneath them, and the theory of plate tectonics which has arisen from these. This is an appropriate time for some stocktaking.

The authors are to be congratulated on having so successfully re-interpreted, indeed in some cases interpreted for the first time in a meaningful way, the many phases in the history of the British Isles area. They have explained the evolution of this part of the Earth's crust in the light of plate tectonics, and have added considerably to the story by using results of hydrocarbon exploration in the North Sea.

With a necessarily chronological

treatment, the reader will gain a broad appreciation of the stratigraphy of the British Isles and the surrounding seas. The book highlights the value of sedimentological studies in stratigraphy. Fossils are used almost exclusively as ecological indicators; the results of their use in correlation are taken very much as read so that some stratigraphical problems are glossed over.

The account is well written. It is profusely illustrated with carefully executed maps and diagrams, and the volume is pleasant and easy to use. Though not advocating expansion in technical vocabulary, one feels that a tautological expression such as "facing confrontation" (page 165) should be eliminated. On the other hand, technical terms which come so readily to hand are sometimes better avoided as in "Perhaps palaeoslopes were directed southwards in this area" (page 234) when speaking of slopes.

This book should be invaluable to students and others who wish to gain some understanding of the evolution of the Earth's crust in the British Isles area. It should serve many generations as a useful framework of spatial and dynamic relationships without which stratigraphy must fail to inspire.

Adopting a metaphor suggested by non-use of the adjective *seminarial* (in the gloss on the back of the book), one would say that the four authors have combined most successfully in the production of a lively 'zygote', especially as it might never have come about but for ". . . a seminal [*sic*] encounter"! □

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Chinese revelation

M. Christine King

China's Road to Development. Edited by Neville Maxwell. Pp.365. (Pergamon International Library: Oxford, 1979.) Hardback £21; paperback £5.25.

It is a strange fact of life that those most responsible for making history have always been the least able to record it for posterity. The result of this is that, from time to time, history has to be re-written. The present volume on China, an enlarged edition of a collection of essays first published in 1976, is perhaps an apposite example of this phenomenon. It appears at a time when China is deliberately revealing its own past in order to point a way to the future. Thus many of the 'development' theories outlined in the work already form part of history, a past which must now be re-examined. Few are more aware of this than the editor, who has the courage to admit in

his prefatory note that "the papers in this collection have to some extent been outdated".

The book consists of 16 essays by different authors covering developments in China since 1949 as seen in its entirety from the western point of view. Between them the authors cover rural development, industrialisation, agriculture, health care and population control, economic planning and trade, environmental protection, women's role in the country's development, forestry, intermediate energy technology, Chinese foreign aid, city planning and the role of the People's Liberation Army. Curiously, the place of science, the very foundation on which China's new history will be written, is relegated to a passing comment.

Often proffered as the ideal model for Third World development, China's growth has provided a burgeoning of material for commentators — so much so that it is often difficult to discern which of the opinions are really derived from Chinese experience and which are merely the theories of development experts. Thus, in a sentence