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Waldron, Scott (2010), *Modernising Agrifood Chains in China: Implications for Rural Development*, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 250 pages; ISBN (10): 1 – 4438-2507-7, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2507-8.

Principally, this book provides an informative account of agrifood chains with particular focus on a case study of the Chinese beef industry. It aims to examine the retail, processing, marketing and production sectors, and the integration of these sectors that form the industry. Waldron highlights the beef industry as worthy of particular attention because it is considered a 'pillar industry' in the development of many poor areas. Waldron deconstructs the value chain to focus on low, mid and high value markets and the changing consumption trends within them. The study draws on a vast data set spanning a period of over ten years of fieldwork.

The book contributes to Chinese studies in a number of ways. It examines the major trends in the beef industry and identifies the pitfalls, inaccuracies and problems associated with relying on state statistics. Waldron therefore attempts to triangulate sources in order to present a more realistic picture which has more policy relevance. It recognises that assumptions based on inaccurate statistics have often led to inappropriate policy and investment decisions. This means the book will be of interest to both practitioners and academics working within commodity governance in China and developing countries. By utilising iterative social science research methodology, Waldron also provides a comprehensive example of how to present the complexity of accumulated datasets for both social scientists and PhD students.

The book highlights a number of important factors, namely the different simultaneous structures, institutional practices and actors involved in the different levels of low, medium and high value chains. It also identifies the fundamental consumption preferences which impact how China's development may not follow the Western view of 'modern supply chains'. The 'quality' required, actors within the value chain, freshness requirements

(Chinese consumers prefer to buy meat that has been slaughtered on the day and not refrigerated), safeguards of standardisation, branding, and certification systems all seem to differ in their approaches to Western value chains. Since Waldron highlights that surveys show that 'tenderness and juiciness are the least valued quality attributes' (119) in China in contrast to Western countries and Japan, it follows that different forms of value chains will be required to facilitate consumer preferences. Moreover, whilst Chinese consumers require certain 'quality' characteristics, simultaneously different supply chains are operating to meet the needs of Korean, Japanese and Western food chains within China.

The section on 'Health and food safety attributes' provides an interesting but brief account of price premiums for certified green and organic products. Waldron highlights that since monitoring is an issue in practice, and there is a fundamental lack of trust in public systems, brand value and brand trust operate to secure price premiums. This is a significant contribution. It would be interesting for Waldron to reflect further on the implications this has for certification and branding. This 'branded agriculture' presents an alternative means of safety assurance in light of failing trust in third party certification schemes. As Waldron highlights, in the beef market this leads to a lack of standardisation, therefore Waldron posits the need to establish 'a common beef language in China' (123). This is important due to five star hotels turning to overseas suppliers to mitigate risk. Interestingly, Waldron identifies how consumers are increasingly prepared to pay for safety assured produce for dishes consumed out of home. This has great implications for expectations on standardisation and certification of produce. Moreover, with international livestock associated disease scares such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Creutzfeldt- Jakob Disease (CJD) and Avian Influenza there is a need for China to increase standardisation in order to create tighter controls and guidelines as preventative measures.

Without reading all the supporting publications by Waldron over the ten year period, I was left wondering about the richness of the data and opinions that were left out. Whether Waldron is pushing for a reassessment of the 'value' in value chains, or advocating assimilation with global models (even though Waldron points to an efficient system which does not take an industrial route) is not exactly clear. Whilst the methodology sets out a positive economic approach which avoids normative assumptions, the book may

benefit from greater reflection on Chinese institutions and institutional processes and the implications this has for the 'modernisation' of value chains in the context of global processes and standardisation. Waldron touches on interesting institutional dimensions but does not explore the implications further. For example, markets in Hong Kong and Taiwan have not necessarily followed the development route of Western supermarket reliance, which has implications for the interpretation of 'modernisation' and 'development'. Fundamentally, more scrutiny could be paid to deconstructing the different 'values' within the value chains in order to provide guidance for standardisation which is both conducive with Chinese institutional operational realities and the broader scope of the global political economy.

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Standen, Naomi (ed.) (2013), *Demystifying China: New Understandings of Chinese History*, Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 244 pages; ISBN 978-1-4422-0895-7.

Naomi Standen's edited volume *Demystifying China* aims to bring current scholarship to bear on a reading public awash with today's intense media coverage of China. Popular and academic interest in China and the Chinese is nothing new, of course, having gone through stages of mixed fascination and fear over many decades of missionary activity, world wars, and commercial ties. Today we are witnessing China's resurgence as an economic and political leader on the world stage, a quite different context and subject of commentary from the 'decaying' dynastic realm or Maoist revolutions that had inspired so much print in previous generations. Yet problematic perceptions generated in times past continue to influence today's conversations, shaping often simplistic media treatments of this massive and diverse thing we call 'China' and its past.

Following on the heels of similarly minded books like Jeffrey Wasserstrom's *China in the 21st Century: What Everyone Should Know* (2010), Standen's volume seeks to 'demystify' its subject by encouraging readers to see China

and its history as a multilayered construct of the Western imagination, of official Chinese sources, both nationalist and Communist, and of generational shifts in scholarly debate and interpretation. Each chapter endeavours to convert the timeless and homogenous monolith presented by much received wisdom on the country into a complex social and political animal that has shared many of the same processes of other modern nation-states.

The volume brings a diverse and international group of 24 contributors together, each of whom sets out to identify problematic but persisting perceptions on a particular topic from ancient, imperial or modern China, or on subjects spanning the millennia. Considering the daunting number of possibilities from which to choose, the topics are well selected, from 'Traditional Chinese and the Environment' to 'Islam in China' and 'Chinese Medicine'. Many of the contributors also walk the reader through the provenance and propagation of common misperceptions: that a singular Great Wall existed since classical times to cut China off from the outside world (the Wall, as we know it, was actually built in the late Ming for the shelter of early firearms, while 'the extravagant claims for the Great Wall appear to have begun with the members of the frustrated Macartney mission to China in 1793' [Lorge, 2013: 26, 29]); that 20th century radicals, hell-bent on cultural transformation and literacy gains, gutted traditional Chinese characters ('the majority of modern simplified characters occur in medieval manuscripts from Dunhuang' [Galambos, 2013: 194]); or that the 'One-Child Policy' has been applied with unbending vigilance across the nation ('no such law was codified until 2001, so in effect central government left implementation of this policy to provincial and local governments, resulting in great variation in interpretation across time and space' [Mittler, 2013: 199]). The result is two dozen valuable mini-studies of the often highly politicised creation of knowledge on China in general. These are ambitious goals for six or seven-page chapters, but the writing here is concise, and often engaging.

Some sections, though, do not meet the stated goals of the volume as well. The chapter on Tibet illustrates a recent shift in Beijing's claims on the region (from a Nationalist-era practice of citing Qing precedents for Chinese control toward one in which the region is seen as always having been part of an 'historical China') with long quotations from CCP mouthpieces without giving any indication of what might lie behind Beijing's continued stranglehold of the region (Sperling, 2013: 146-7). Nearly half of the world's population lives

downriver from the Tibetan plateau, and pointing out that China's long history of struggle with drought is undoubtedly as much of a factor in China's Tibetan policy as blind nationalism, would have been more illuminating, and 'demystifying', on the subject of Chinese motives than the chapter's concentration on a polemical push to refashion history.

And there are some rather narrow historical interpretations here that readers might take issue with, such as a chapter that seeks to refute longstanding charges of incompetence against the Nationalist regime by extolling its fiscal policy, but without giving any attention to this policy's huge social costs, particularly to rural communities, costs that help account for the urban-based regime's 1949 defeat by the rural-based CCP. *Demystifying China* should nonetheless prove helpful to a variety of audiences and for a variety of uses: it strikes a good balance of accessibility and depth for use as a classroom text on fundamental subjects in Chinese history, as a primer for journalists and policy-makers seeking clarity on the region, and a handy reference for historians seeking refreshers on topics beyond their own area or period of expertise. Especially helpful are the further readings listed and briefly described at the end of each chapter. These offer quick references to influential works on particular subjects while giving a sense of where the historiography on China has come from over the last century.

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Lai, Amy Tak-yee (2011), *Chinese Women Writers in Diaspora: Jung Chang, Xinran, Hong Ying, Anchee Min, Adeline Yen Mah*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 187 pages; ISBN (10): 1-438-2847-5, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2847-5.

This is a brave book, brimming over with energy and enthusiasm for the subject. Lai gives the reader a critical overview of the work of five well-known Chinese female authors all now living outside China, and all published and well-received in English. It is not a book that would be easily read by a novice in this field of literature, and, for reasons discussed below, it might not find

acceptance among experts in the field. If used with care, it might be suitable recommended reading for undergraduate and masters' level students of modern Chinese literature and/or gender issues in literature. I would wait for a revised, proofread version before recommending it to students.

The book deals linearly with each writer and applies a separate literary concept or theory to each. The chapter devoted to Jung Chang's *Wild Swans* is very brief, and is entitled 'Prologue: More Wild Swans': Lai uses this work as a springboard for the broader, more varied and perhaps more literary work of the remaining four writers. The chapter on Xinran, 'Self and Other', concentrates mainly on the autobiographical voice in Xinran's reports of the lives of the women of China. The emphasis of the chapter on Hong Ying is on the cyclical nature of Hong Ying's narratives, the relationship to Buddhism, and the cyclical structuring of Chinese history. Anchee Min's work is reviewed in terms of theatricality and Adeline Yen Mah's stories are examined in the light of the European fairy tale tradition.

The author has worked hard to scour relevant sources, and presents a comprehensive picture of the subject matter and messages of each of the works discussed. The research has obviously been very thorough, but the writing up is less satisfactory. Perhaps because of the author's urgent sense of mission, the information pours out, and there is not always a clear distinction between the stories as told by the diaspora writers, the facts about their works and the author's analysis of them. Lai seems to have decided to apply one theory per author and ignore all else. For those readers who are not familiar with the works, this could offer somewhat skewed and perhaps even unfair perceptions of the writers. The insistence on the autobiographical nature of Xinran's writing, for example, perhaps overstates the case. All writers inevitably write from their own viewpoint, however objective they try to be: all writing is in some sense deictic, and to insist that because Xinran reflects on how the women's stories affect her personally does not mean that this is 'autobiography'. The weight given to the notion of theatricality in Anchee Min's work (perhaps rather too obvious, given Min's background) excludes the deep and subtle treatment Min gives to the huge psychological impact of the years of the Cultural Revolution. My feeling is that Lai has been swept away by the appeal of the lurid, the vivid and the sensational, which, after all, are there to reveal something the reader might not otherwise see. The chapter on Mah's writing and its relationship to fairy tales dwells almost

exclusively on the European tradition, only touching briefly on the Chinese tradition, from which she could have drawn much more very rich supporting material. The topics of sister hierarchy, and orphan and stepmother, for example, seem to be viewed in this work as western concepts, yet they are found elaborated widely in Chinese nursery rhymes and stories. Lai's categorisation tends to be rather rigid, and at times she makes some very dogmatic statements, with rather liberal use of words like 'therefore' and 'hence', when there is actually no stated causal link. There is sometimes a disquieting lack of coherence, possibly due to careless cutting for the sake of the word count. At one point Lai writes: 'This is not to say that the novel betrays an overwhelming sarcasm towards Western stories' (169). This is puzzling, since she has not previously mentioned sarcasm or satire, and has gone to great lengths to show the positive influence of the 'Western' stories on Mah's writing.

The work does have redeeming features: it is a stimulating read, and could lead students to wider reading and considerations of the field. There are, however, many problems, which could have been avoided by careful editing and proofreading. If anything, the work is over-ambitious. Fewer authors and works would have allowed greater depth of analysis and a more balanced consideration of some of the qualities and characteristics attributed to the writers. The initial drawback of the book is that the chapter titles and contents page are opaque, and there is no index: there is no signposting for the reader at all. A clearer structure with subheadings, listed in the contents pages, would have helped the writer herself to construct a meaningful progression for each chapter, with a brief statement of the aims and content of the chapter, followed by essential context of the authors and their times, synopses of the works, and then, a clearly structured analysis. The prologue and epilogue are really just short chapters, rather than true introductory and concluding discussions. The reader has to work quite hard to develop his or her own formal schema, since none is provided by the author. Readers who are able to read Chinese would probably be dissatisfied with the lack of distinction between work written in Chinese and translated into English, and work written in English. There is a world of difference. When dealing with translated text, Lai does not provide the Chinese source text, a major omission.

Sadly, the whole book is riddled with misprints (including the dreaded 'pubic' for 'public' and 'vices' for 'voices'), there are numerous grammatical

and syntactic infelicities which sometimes lead to a degree of incomprehensibility, and there are numerous misleading malapropisms (for example 'engrossed' for 'involved'). Quotations from the writers discussed are frequently miscopied. The number and degree of errors would make this book rather bewildering for a novice in the field. Thoroughly revised and re-structured, it might become a useful book.

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Hernandez, Lili (ed.) (2012), *China and the West: Encounters with the Other in Culture, Arts, Politics and Everyday Life*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 184 pages; ISBN (10): 1-4438-3780-6, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-3780-4.

China constitutes one of the best stages for demonstrating the conflict and convergence of East and West. Boasting a long history and unique traditional culture as well as stronger interaction with the West day by day, China is, in the words of Hernandez, 'a conjunction of elements of past and present, the traditional and the modern, immutability and on-going transformation' (ix). The subject of China and the West has never failed to attract the attention of relevant scholars in a variety of fields and this edited volume is a case in point containing, as it does, perspectives from different academic backgrounds. The eleven essays in the book will be informative to readers, both academic and non-academic, who are not so familiar with the theme 'encounters with the other', as well as those who are particularly interested in, for example, media, art and anthropology. Building on the notion of stereotypes as first explored by Said (1979) in his work *Orientalism*, this book offers expanded notions on how 'the other' can be analysed in different contexts; however, due to its wide coverage of a number of disciplines, some chapters can only serve as general introductions with little room for deeper insight.

The first five chapters are media-related studies: a negative encounter between the West and Chinese youth cultures as revealed in an online website (Chapter One), contrasting US and Chinese media representations of the 2001

Hainan Incident (Chapter Two), Sinophobic perspectives shown in a BBC documentary film *The Chinese Are Coming!* (Chapter Three), and introductions to other Western or Chinese produced documentary films: *China* or *China from the Inside* known in the U.S, *Nanking, City of War: The Story of John Rabe* and *City of Life and Death* (Chapters Four and Five). The next two chapters explore encounters with multiculturalism through Westerners' lives, experiences and identities in southern China: Shanghai (Chapter Six) and Ningbo (Chapter Seven). Chapters Eight and Nine proffer art-related studies involving the national and transnational in 798 art zone and Chinese contemporary art theory, while Chapter Ten introduces a pilot study on Chinese academics' and students' perceptions of Australian literature, where the notion of soft diplomacy comes into play. The final chapter focuses on *linglei* 另类, new Chinese youth subcultures that have clear Western influences.

Some of the chapters, particularly One, Six and Seven, embrace the main theme of the volume to provide readers with valuable new perceptions through local or specific case studies, either adding depth to the wide expanse of existing broad studies of the subject or offering the counter story in terms of 'encounter with the other'. Chapter One, for example, does the latter by shifting attention to anti-western sentiment exhibited by Chinese youth based on a study of 'anti-CNN.com'. Chapter Six and Seven, do the former, by examining everyday life in Shanghai and Ningbo to reveal a vivid picture of how Chinese and Western cultures both collide and cohere on a day-to-day basis. Other chapters, however, seem ill-fitting. Chapter Two, for example, offers a typical comparative media study using content analysis of a news event, yet I fail to see how it connects to the theme 'encounters with the other'; 'representation of the other to one's own interest' appears to be a more suitable theme here.

The number of existing works on China and the West is not small, yet this volume did stand out in two significant respects. First of all, the context of this book is modern China rather than China from the 18th to early 20th century. Earlier works have tended to focus on this initial period of 'encountering the other' and have applied theories of colonialism as well as imperialism (pertinent examples include Hibbert's 1970 book *The Dragon Wakes: China and the West, 1793-1911*; Bergère's 1981 chapter 'The Other China': Shanghai from 1919-1949' in *Shanghai: Revolution and Development in an Asian*

Metropolis; and Bickers' more recent 1999 work *Britain in China: Community, Culture and Colonialism, 1900-49*). *China and the West*, however, presents encounters of the other in a social environment where concepts of globalization, post-colonialism and post-modernization are more applicable. Secondly, unlike much of the existing research on the subject, *China and the West* invites us to view the subject through multi-various disciplinary lenses. Nonetheless, as I mentioned above, this arrangement also results in inadequacy in terms of depth of analysis (an interesting contrast in this regard would be Velingerova and Wang's 2001 volume *The Appropriation of Cultural Capital: China's May Fourth Project*, which seems to find a better balance in this regard). The advantage of this structure means that the book will be able to reach a wider range of readers, especially those that are still seeking a way in to a better understanding of China's encounters with the West in more modern times; it might frustrate, however, those more familiar with the subject.

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