

## Communications to the Editor

### On Review of *Essays on Chinese Civilization*

Dennis Grafflin's review of my *Essays on Chinese Civilization* (JAS 42, no. 2 [1983]: 377–78) is—to use a deliberately non-extreme word—unusual. I say this because, aside from a two-word phrase the review applies favorably to one of the essays, its attitude from beginning to end is consistently and strongly negative with respect to the essays themselves, their arrangement in the book, their origins, what I write about them in my introduction, and what the book's two editors (Charles Le Blanc and Dorothy Borei) write about me in their foreword.

Apparently the question of arrangement is a major one for the reviewer. He objects to placing "feudalism" under "The Formation of Chinese Culture," ignoring the fact that the feudalism essay, chronologically speaking, focuses on the Chou dynasty, whose major role in the formation of Chinese culture can hardly be denied. Rather than spend space on such quibbling, I would have supposed that the review would have seen his prime responsibility to be that of evaluating the essay itself. This, however, he does not do. Indeed, he does not even specify the essay by name.

Soon afterward he describes another essay as "resurrected from a coffee-table book." Here again, instead of using this needlessly pejorative language, he might have given his opinion about the essay itself. This, however, he does only by deriving several generalizations from it, whose accuracy or significance he does not bother either to affirm or deny. Apparently his mere assertion of them constitutes in his eyes sufficiently damning evidence.

The next topic is the book's introduction in which appear my recently written evaluations—some favorable, some unfavorable—about essays that in many cases had been originally published by me several decades ago. To show how bad the book really is, the reviewer draws exclusively on certain unfavorable comments, pulling them out of context and ignoring all others that are the least bit favorable. When I wrote these comments, I tried hard to be as completely candid and objective as possible, believing then—as I still do today—that most readers would view them as contributing substantially to the interest and value of the book.

Of the book's twenty-one essays, Grafflin refers obliquely or by name to six. He says nothing about the existence of the remainder or about the considerable diversity of subject matter they embody. This topical diversity, I had hoped, would enable almost any reader to find at least something of interest. If space permitted, *a great deal more* could be said about this review. I only hope that when, several decades hence, Grafflin approaches my present age, he will by then have accumulated so many fine essays on China as to produce an anthology that in subject matter, arrangement, and every other respect will enjoy widespread commendation from its readers.

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