

movements. Despite the major differences between postmartial law in Taiwan and China, both cases show a split between national-level associations (which are formalized and voluntary) and local movements that are informal and communal and often use local identity and culture and religion to mobilize their support. He also shows that while at the top levels many environmental organizations look Western, at the local level they have strong connections to Taiwanese religion, kinship, and gender relations. A concluding chapter, "Alternate Civilities and Political Change," argues that the bonds of local community, kinship, religion, and the informal sector, which many have dismissed as premodern or have failed to see in their search for "civil society," are the foundation for a civility that can be democratic. The author presents a gradualist argument for political change, noting that in Taiwan political openness came quickly "but the success of that transition depended on a social world that had grown up in the preceding decades" (p. 146). He notes that supporting NGOs in China, which is popular with foreign governments and organizations, perpetuates the pattern of joining state and society whereas local associations are not simply an extension of the state.

Most anthropologists have been silent in the "civil society" debate because they see the concept as excessively universalizing, abstract, and based on Western history. Robert Weller argues that it is not Chinese culture that is inadequate for the modern world, but the concept of "civil society" itself that is inadequate. He takes "a worm's-eye view of society, from the bottom up," and takes advantage of this to see "a whole range of cultural variation in both China and Taiwan, including the alternatives to authoritarianism that thrive in the free space it always leaves" (p. 7). "Keeping our analytic feet underground will clarify how shared market pressures need not lead to shared values, even within Chinese society" (p. 16). Once one understands the alternate forms of intermediate social organization in China, one can better understand the Taiwan case—which is also a challenge to the view that Chinese culture is authoritarian. "China may never have had a democratic political culture, but it did have the kinds of intermediate institutions outside politics that could evolve to support one" (p. 143). This book is an important contribution in ethnographic data and analysis to the literature on civil society and Chinese democracy.

The book is very well written and balanced, presenting the contradictions of ethnographic experience and of life. It is a major contribution to our understanding of Chinese culture, skillfully weaving together discussions on authoritarianism and democracy, as well as the causes of Taiwan's economic success. For readers who know Chinese and Taiwanese societies, the book resolves so many problems that it is a delight to read. Students will appreciate its succinct and clear prose and numerous brief examples.

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The Mouth That Begs: Hunger, Cannibalism, and the Politics of Eating in Modern China. By GANG YUE. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999. 447 pp. \$64.95 (cloth); \$20.95 (paper).

This book is a new literary and cultural study of modern China covering 1918 to 1996, and uses food as a metaphor for desire and survival. Chapter 1 examines Lu Xun's irresistible desire to expose the dark side of the old Chinese feudal society that

is marked by cannibalism. The author elaborates on Lu Xun's frustration at being a madman and his ambivalence toward the incurable Chinese masses. The author then switches the focus to Shen Congwen's distinct intoxication with the Chinese way of life—the petty pleasure of eating snacks, a mother's warmth, the raw sex of the working class, even a repugnant necrophilia. Here, the obscene is transformed into the fantastic.

Chapters 2 and 3 cover the time roughly from 1939 to the 1989 June Fourth Incident. The author reconstructs this period of fifty years by selecting literary works that target the essence of Chinese life: food, the lack of food, and the effort to feed the masses with spiritual food—Communist (Maoist) ideology. Zhang Xianliang, Ah Cheng, Zheng Yi, Liu Zhenyun, and Mo Yan are discussed here. The author focuses on Zheng Yi's *Red Monument* (1993) and suggests that his revisitation of a 1968 incident of cannibalism in Guangxi province results from his reaction to the demonstrated madness of open massacre during the June Fourth Incident. If life can be so casually dealt with, let the full truth be told, including buried cannibalism in the past. Interestingly, the author takes Zheng Yi to task for failing to maintain his documentary focus when he allows his desire to preach to take over. The author then discusses how the failure of the spiritual food of the Communist ideology led Ah Cheng to weave a beautiful yet obscure Daoist world in his "Chess King" (1984). It is around this time that "root searching" arrived in the 1980s cultural landscape, and Shen Congwen's imagined nostalgia was revived. Mo Yan produced his high carnival of primitive life force in *Red Sorghum Family* (1987), and yet, after June Fourth, his "carnival" transformed into "carnivorism" (*chi-rou*) in *Liquorland* (1992). The author argues that Mo Yan gets carried away by his unleashed but downward abandon when he loses himself completely in his creation of a chaotic drunken world, featuring boys as gourmet cuisine.

Chapter 4 focuses on six women writers. The author discusses Xiao Hong's poetic depiction of hunger, her detached sorrow, and her determined exile spirit in *Market Street* (1936). According to the author, Wang Anyi's *Melody of Everlasting Regret* (1996) reevaluates a liberated woman's life in China by ironically juxtaposing her successful life, devoid of domestic love, with that of a former KMT official's concubine who constructs her own lasting domestic life around a stove, through her cooking. Li Ang's *The Butcher's Wife* (1983) portrays women's degradation as merely meat (*rou*) for men, yet it is the exchange of sex for food and the retaliation against it which highlights this novel. The author keenly notes that all three writers are not feminists in the strict sense and, precisely because of that, they are able to reveal the subtle uneasiness with the imbalance implied by their treatment of food, sex, male, and female.

Having moved from cannibalism in Lu Xun and others, to the post-June Fourth carnivorism in Mo Yan, the author returns to cannibalism as presented in works by selected Chinese American women writers. The author discusses Maxine Hong Kingston, Jade Snow Wong, and Amy Tan. Here, the author shows a relative lack of appreciation for American-born Chinese writers when he criticizes Tan's "ignorance of modern Chinese cultural politics" (p. 364) and pronounces her "guilty of an unmediated presentation of old China" (p. 365). As I stated earlier, although entitled: *The Mouth That Begs: Hunger, Cannibalism and the Politics of Eating in Modern China*, this book is essentially about survival through food. The Chinese-American women writers' interest in writing about food is a natural result of their being situated in the United States where China equals Chinese food. Though blunt, it is exactly from this identity through food that ethnic Chinese writers often draw self-empowerment or rebellion against their foreign identity. The fact that the author packages his book

with the startling title of “*chi* (to eat; eating)” may very well be his (un)conscious marketing strategy.

If the meat of this book is the Chinese texts the author analyzes, its bones are various Western theorists such as Paul de Man and Fredric Jameson. With theory and text properly balanced, this book is easy to read. The author’s style is excellent, flowing smoothly and affectionately persuasive. He is obviously very learned and has abundant enthusiasm for his topic; one can almost picture him talking just the way he writes. This book is a breakthrough in the field of literary and cultural criticism on modern China with a provocative approach. One not only gains knowledge from reading it, but can also enjoy reading it time and again.

One minor caution, though, is that the author might be somewhat careless when he eagerly introduces a few Chinese characters, which he calls the Chinese sign system, as his key concepts. These include *chi* (eating), *wei* (flavor), and *mu* (ox-herding). “Chi, the mouth that begs” is borrowed directly from Mo Yan (p. 17). Adding to Mo Yan’s interpretation of the character *chi*, the author further legitimizes this reading by treating it as a “signifier.” Again, breaking it down into two parts: *kou* (mouth) and *qi* (to beg), thus “the mouth that begs.” But clearly *chi* is a *xingsheng zi* (phonetic compound) which takes “mouth” to indicate the meaning and “beg” merely as a phonetic part which roughly indicates the pronunciation. The same applies to *wei*. Although remarkably appropriate for the content of this book—“the mouth that begs” cries out hunger, desire, and survival—one cannot help worrying that these Chinese characters (*chi* and *wei*) might lose their original meanings and thus, in the future, be limited to the narrow definitions suggested here.

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INNER ASIA

A History of Russia, Central Asia and Mongolia. Vol. 1, Inner Eurasia from Prehistory to the Mongol Empire. By DAVID CHRISTIAN. London: Blackwell Publishers, 1998. 472 pp. \$62.95 (cloth); \$27.95 (paper).

Braudel’s notion of the *longue durée* is often invoked in principle but rarely applied in practice. This volume, the first of two covering a period of one hundred thousand years, certainly qualifies the author as one of the foremost practitioners of this approach to historical study. Christian takes as his unit of inquiry a region he calls “Inner Eurasia,” the drier and less densely populated heartland of the continent which includes the vast steppe lands as well as the forest lands to their north and the deserts and oases to their south. This he distinguishes from “Outer Eurasia,” the relatively well-watered “coastal subcontinents” such as India, China, and Western Europe.

Christian is particularly interested in the environmental forces within this inner zone that shaped its inhabitants’ “strategies of ecological, economic, political and military mobilization” and how these strategies differ from those used in Outer Eurasia. This is a formidable task he sets himself, one that would stretch any scholar’s reach in time and space but one that the author carries off with great success.