

presenting their ideas. The 1990s were a decade of huge change; they began in the bitter aftermath of June 4 (virtually unmentioned in the book) and continued through the reigniting of “Reform and Opening” after Deng Xiaoping’s “Journey to the South” in 1992. Then came the two mid-decade Taiwan crises, the economic takeoff that culminated at the end of the decade with the U.S.-China agreement on terms of China’s WTO accession in 1999 (and the formal accession in 2001), the American political convulsion over alleged Chinese theft of “crown jewel” nuclear secrets, and other traumas of the late 1990s.

By now, despite widening and deepening mutual familiarity, the problem for Americans and Chinese alike of understanding each other’s perceptions—and words—has, at times, become more rather than less difficult. In a recent private correspondence, an American researcher addressed the problem succinctly:

If you talk to senior PRC US experts in person versus reading what they write in print, one could be forgiven for thinking that the written products were put together by different people. As one expert has explained to me, the “requests for comment” often come with “suggested guidelines” or phrases that the higher-up would like associated with these scholars—sometimes these are included even if the scholar has returned a draft that did not use them. . . . China is often a place of smoke and mirrors—one frequently doesn’t know an interlocutor’s true views nor does one know who commissioned a given piece or why.

Still, taken on its own terms, this is a useful study, and it ends on a largely positive note. In his final pages, the author stresses the opportunities for mutual benefit that China and the United States will face if they can manage to cooperate with one another. That is a reasonable aspiration, but one that will demand continued, even deeper efforts on both sides.

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*China on the Sea: How the Maritime World Shaped Modern China.* By ZHENG YANGWEN. Leiden: Brill, 2012. viii, 362 pp. \$176.00 (cloth).  
doi:10.1017/S0021911812001453

This book draws on archival documents, published histories, and visual materials to argue that Qing China (1644–1912) was a strongly consumerist society, and that much of what it consumed arrived by sea, often on foreign ships. Zheng Yangwen’s interest in the huge role of foreign goods in early modern Chinese consumption grows out of her earlier book on opium, which drew attention to the late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century fashion for

“foreign goods” (*yanghuo*). She argues for a major trade shift beginning during the Ming, when luxuries for use at court gradually yielded place to goods for much more general consumption. In other words, “consumer goods for the first time in history dictated the volume of maritime trade” (p. 243), and Zheng asserts that by the mid-Qing this shift was widely in evidence.

Zheng links both population growth and spreading consumption to maritime trade. At the same time, she makes a convincing case for the need for greater historical attention to the commercial influence of Southeast Asia, which was a source of such luxury imports as birds’ nests and sea cucumbers while simultaneously providing China with much-needed grain imports that sustained unprecedented demographic expansion. She also seeks to overturn several misapprehensions, including the assumption that the Qing focused primarily on its inland frontiers until Europeans forced it to look seaward, and the now outdated view that China was mostly uninterested in what foreigners had to offer.

The book begins with a survey of China’s overseas trade from earliest times through the well-known early-fifteenth-century voyages to the Indian subcontinent, the Persian Gulf, and East Africa, and it notes that Buddhism was one important import that owed much to maritime links originally forged for commercial purposes. Zheng addresses the development of bureaucratic mechanisms for controlling maritime affairs, but surprisingly, given the book’s title, pays little attention to the role of military exigency and the intertwining of commercial with military functions in the development of the Chinese navy, whose earlier domination of the commercial sea routes was at least partly facilitated by coercion. She is much more interested in what the seas brought to China than what China took to the seas.

Chapter 2, “The Inconsistency of the Seas,” examines in detail Qing maritime policy, including the early bans on seaborne trade, meant as a defense against increasingly predatory piracy, and the early encounters with Europeans. It suggests that, growing consumerism notwithstanding, imperial security concerns ultimately trumped the quest for profit. Those concerns were related partly to the desire to secure the coastal frontiers and partly to the challenge of “Feeding China,” the subject of chapter 3, which addresses imports of rice from Siam and of maize and “foreign yams” from the New World.

Chapter 4 focuses on the importation of clocks, important for keeping time, of course, and long known to have attracted enormous interest in China. Zheng argues that clocks globalized China willy-nilly through their dual function as objects of fashion and as timekeepers. This chapter and the following one, which addresses the construction of the missionary-designed, Western-style palaces of the Yuanmingyuan, “China’s Versailles,” highlight the passion of the “Three Emperors,” Kangxi (1662–1722), Yongzheng (1723–35), and Qianlong (1736–95), for genuine European imports. At the same time, these chapters analyze the indigenization of foreign goods and the filtering down of court tastes into society at large. In this section, Zheng focuses on questions of consumer desire and its relation to political power, but she avoids placing the Yuanmingyuan in the context of other Qing palaces such as Chengde, now understood to be, in effect, a theme park of empire. Might not the European-style palaces also

have been an illustration of the same tendency, albeit in a different register, rather than purely the product of imperial acquisitiveness? In these chapters, a marked inclination not to engage fully with the existing literature becomes most pronounced.

Chapter 6, “Wind of the West,” notes changes in conceptualizations of Europe, from “West Ocean” to “Europe” and ultimately “The West,” that occurred as maritime trade became essential to the rapidly growing Chinese market for consumer goods of all kinds. Chapter 7, “Pattern and Variation: Indigenisation,” brings the story into the early twentieth century, analyzing variables in the indigenization process, while chapter 8, “Race for Oriental Opulence,” touches on the “strange parallels” (p. 293) between European chinoiserie and Chinese euroiserie. The author concludes by drawing on a number of recent studies of consumption in twentieth-century China, including its links to nationalism, arguing for a fairly straightforward trajectory from late imperial to modern times.

Those seeking real maritime history may be disappointed by this book, but the author is to be lauded for having flagged both the importance of maritime trade to Qing China and the consequent boom in consumerism. It will be of interest mainly for historians of global economic and consumer history and of relations between China and Europe.

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## INNER ASIA

*The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land.* By GARDNER BOVINGDON.  
New York: Columbia University Press, 2012. xvi, 280 pp. \$45.00 (cloth).  
doi:10.1017/S0021911812001465

After the riots of July 2009, few could doubt the extent of hostility to Chinese rule among Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Yet with resistance remaining sporadic and disorganized, and opportunities for field research highly constrained, the conflict in Xinjiang presents challenges to the traditional methods of political scientists. This book is introduced as a study of “representational” politics in two senses of the word: the first is delegation, i.e., who has the right to speak in Xinjiang. The second is representation itself: the conflicting narratives of Xinjiang’s past and present, which are pitted against each other in the competition for local and international opinion. The book’s source material consists of a wide variety of such representations, ranging from internal party bulletins and scholarly position