

## BOOK REVIEWS

be well served to supplement student reading with a source book such as Patricia Ebreys's *Chinese Civilization and Society* (Free Press, New York, 1993) or de Bary's classic *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (Columbia University Press, 1960, 1998). Either text would provide a good balance to Fairbank's presentation.

Broader coverage for the first three thousand years of Chinese civilization would also be welcome. As noted above, nearly two-thirds of the text is devoted to the period from 1644 to the present. The speed with which Fairbank examines China's early history unfortunately leads to the slighting of important eras and dynasties. The most glaring example comes with coverage of the Song Dynasty, in power for three centuries, ennobled with the epithet "China's Greatest Age," and yet afforded less than thirty pages. In his desire to discover why China fell behind the West, Fairbank unintentionally leaves the impression that the first three millenniums served as little more than a prelude to the present.

Students familiar with contemporary events will also be curious about the lack of attention given to Tibet. Only mentioned about a half-dozen times, and never in the context of the 1950 "liberation" from imperialist control or the 1959 suppression of anti-Chinese protests, Tibet is virtually absent from Fairbank's otherwise extensive review of Inner Asian relations. Given the recent visibility and popularity of the Free Tibet movement, the general reader and student will be disappointed with this deficiency. This is particularly surprising given Fairbank's introductory assertion that as for culturalism, "we must broaden our sights: the Inner Asian peoples have been a critical part of the history of the Chinese people" (p. 25). Therefore, while peripheral to the story of China per se, the Tibetan situation nevertheless represents another important aspect of China's relation to the rest of the world and its perception of itself.

Finally, two minor improvements would bolster the effectiveness of the text. For advanced students and Sinologists, the inclusion of Chinese characters would be a welcome addition. I also found that the extensive list of suggested readings, while helpful, was nevertheless awkward to use and would benefit from tighter correlation to the text. In this regard, footnoting would also help those wishing to pursue further study. An "author index" cross-references the reading list with textual citations, but tends to be cumbersome in usage.

Despite these shortcomings, *China: A New History* provides the general reader and students with a highly accessible and readable introduction to the vast history of one of the world's oldest surviving civilizations. Clearly suitable for the undergraduate introductory course, it may also lend itself to advanced secondary school instruction. Overall, this text is a fitting culmination to an exemplary life devoted to both teaching and research. ■

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## Sweet and Sour

### *One Woman's Chinese Adventure, One Man's Chinese Torture*

by Brooks Robards and Jim Kaplan

NEW YORK: SUMMERSET PRESS, 1995

XI + 234 PAGES

**L**ike other books by Americans traveling to Third World countries, this book dwells too much on the discomforts and not enough on the local people. Travel accounts seem to be egocentric, telling us more about the writer's peccadilloes and emotions than about the place being visited. The early chapters that relate the authors' decision to go, preparations, and initial problems are a very long introduction to the real heart of the book. It is not until chapters 15, 16 and 17 that we finally learn about the jobs they had and the people they met. These chapters are the best in the book in that they provide some insight into the life of people in China and the thoughts of individuals as they try to accomplish their jobs and fulfill their dreams. The first several chapters seemed to be stuck on culture shock and the adjustments necessary to living in a Third World country, some of which I felt they should have expected and been prepared for.

It is tiresome reading about the meals the travelers ate, communication and language difficulties with taxi drivers, the public and private sanitary accommodations, and the interesting foreign friends they made in the Friendship Hotel. Some of these observations are useful to people who have never lived outside the United States but seem to be endlessly repeated in travel tales by Americans abroad. You almost want to ask, "Why didn't you stay home?" Having coped with these concerns myself in earlier stays in Korea (1968–71) and in China (1994–96) as well, I felt one of the best ways to manage them was merely to accept them, deal with them, and get on with it.

If you expected things to be as at home, why did you travel in the first place? Some of the insights provided by various companions were interesting, as Marilyn Goldstein's observation, "Poor China. They're committed to Confucianism, Communism and capitalism at the same time" (on page 212), but I would rather have had the space devoted to the authors' own experiences of working with Chinese and their insights into Chinese life as a result. While they encountered some charming and talented companions in the Friendship Hotel, it seems that they are more interested in them than in the Chinese. As many foreign journalists are thought to derive all their knowledge of China second hand through the eyes of other foreigners at the Press Club rather than by mingling with the population and relating their own experiences, this seems to be true of Robards and Kaplan as well.

As recounted in their experiences with bridge players and film directors, both of the authors had wonderful opportunities to learn about China. The interviews and experiences in chapters 15,

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16, and 17 were the most interesting in the book, and I would like to have read more of them. Five months is an incredibly short time to learn anything about a foreign country when you lack language skills and are still getting beyond the first culture shock encounters, but I do give them credit for trying.

Maybe it is hard to find something interesting beyond the trite for a general readership, but there are nuggets such as Brooks's interviews with women directors and their views of women's place in the world. Hu Mei, best known for her film, *Army Nurse* (1985), and a popular television series, *Endless Love* (1992), told her, "Woman is born to make men happy. You have to follow nature." Robards comments that this seems to contradict the evidence of her own career (p. 100).

Li Shaohong, fifth generation director (one of the first class of students to enter Beijing Film Academy after the Cultural Revolution), is quoted on pages 97–98 as saying, "[T]here are no feminist movies in China. In China the problems women face are different. . . . What we have experienced is different. Before 1949, women lived in a feudal society. Then Mao taught that women can hold up half the sky. We have been taught not to see the differences." Li thought women should make more movies about men. "Women look at the world as a man's world," she suggested. "For men directors, women are at least half their lives so they pay a lot of attention. For women, men are all their lives. For a woman with a successful career but an unhappy emotional life, success is meaningless." However, Robards provided very little explanation for why these women would feel this way, or how their experience is different from that of Western women, or what she learned from her interviews about the lives of contemporary women.

While Kaplan placed himself as the complainer and disaffected member to make a contrast, it seemed from my reading of his experiences that he had a wonderful opportunity through playing bridge to contact people who truly shared his interests and were willing and able to interact with him as equals in learning and enjoying the game of bridge. These encounters seemed to me to be the warmest way people could meet and be themselves without having to project any particular cultural or governmental ideology. He was able to just share an activity with people without having to justify or explain it.

Kaplan does offer one worthwhile observation on page 203: "If significant change is to occur, it will come from workers aroused over their conditions, not students waving the American flag." Changing expectations and the decline of the power of the *danwei* (work unit) are important areas in which Chinese are

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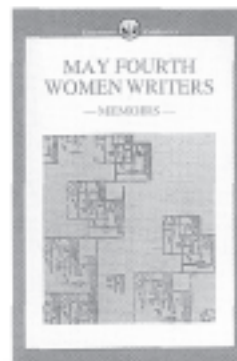
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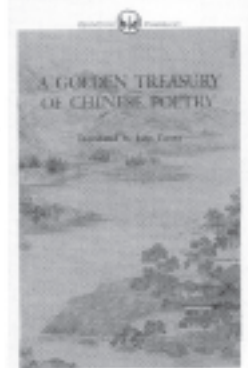
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creating their own world. If Korea, Taiwan and Thailand can serve as examples, increased literacy, greater expectations of work opportunities and rewards, and the increase of news of how people elsewhere live will produce internal change in the life of the Chinese people in a relatively short period of time. As has been shown in the Philippines, there may be a point at which the central leadership will be obviously inept so that the people will be able to topple it and create their own forms of government. There is precedence for this in China's past. The mandate can move away from those in power if it is not diligently maintained and responsive, not merely repressive.

As a book for K-12 teachers and students, it will be of interest and use to those who are planning to go to China as teachers on exchange or who are planning to take students to China for study. The early chapters can provide topics for discussion on how to prepare for daily difficulties during a stay in China and can supplement study on China's history and culture. Those who are planning to teach or feel their main goal is to inculcate American ways and ideology will be able to see that the Chinese, like others, adopt what they feel is useful and try to screen out what they feel is harmful. The government isn't always successful in getting its definition of useful and harmful accepted, but its attempts to do so are a way to discern the values of the society. The greatest subversion, if that is the intent, is to just be yourself, so that Americans are seen as human beings just like the Chinese, able to share in likes and dislikes, able to laugh, play and work, and able to grow through experience. It is difficult for governments to rouse hate and fear of others when the others are individuals with faces. This is what these exchanges accomplish, not the introduction of American journalistic practices or the corrections of English prose, but the identification of the other as similar to self. ■

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## My City A Hong Kong Story

By Xi Xi

Translated by Eva Hung

HONG KONG: RENDITIONS PAPERBACKS, 1993  
180 PAGES

**H**ong Kong, a place that is often considered the most international city in Asia, was Britain's last major colony, and is now the People's Republic of China's richest and most cosmopolitan urban center. Yet, for all that Hong Kong is a city open to the world, the works of its writers remain relatively unknown to non-Chinese readers. This translation of one of the most highly regarded novels of one of Hong Kong's most prominent and prolific authors is a product of the efforts of the Research Centre for Translation of the Chinese University of Hong Kong to make the literature of Hong Kong accessible to a larger audience.

*My City* was written in the mid-1970s, a particularly interesting period in Hong Kong's history. It was during this time that a sense of local identity began to assert itself, as the locally born and raised population began to outnumber what had been predominantly a society of immigrants and refugees from mainland China. This period also saw the emergence of other developments and issues that would preoccupy the people of Hong Kong until the end of colonial rule, and to this very day: the impact of vigorous economic growth, new influxes of refugees from China and Vietnam, and the looming issue of the Chinese government's resumption of sovereignty over Hong Kong.

Although all of these receive direct or indirect mention in its pages, *My City* is a book to be read less for the purpose of gaining specific insight into social issues, as to achieve a feeling for the ethos of time and place, in which the above developments have combined to create that distinctly Hong Kong atmosphere of East-West cultural fusion, restless movement and change, and a pervading sense of both anxiety over, and optimism for, the future.

This work is not a particularly easy one to read. It is written in a style which owes much to the influences of magic realism, and in a narrative tone that is at once childlike and wryly mature. There is little in the way of plot or story. What exists may be said to center around the character of Fruits, a child when the story opens, and later a young adult; however, an equal amount of effort is placed upon describing the thoughts and actions of Fruits's friends and family members. As the translator notes in her preface, the narrative technique adopted in *My City* has been compared to various approaches used in painting, particularly to the technique of "scattered perspective" in which different objects are shown from different perspectives (xi-xii). With no real center to the book, it is difficult not to occasionally get the feeling that the author is simply rambling on.

Certainly, much of the charm of the book lies in an understanding of the nuances of the language employed. But another dif-