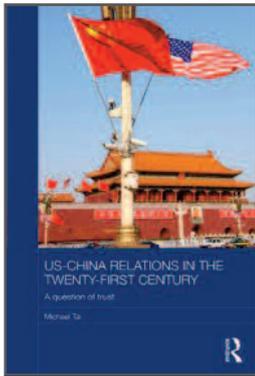


# Book reviews



**Michael Tai,**  
**US-China Relations in the**  
**Twenty-First Century:**  
**A Question of Trust,**  
 Abingdon, Oxon & New York,  
 Routledge, 2015, xviii, 206 pp.

## JEAN-PIERRE CABESTAN

This book is not just another analysis of Sino-American relations. It is rather an attempt to explain the difficulties in the relations between China and the United States by making trust, or rather the lack of it, the main or even the only cause of those difficulties. There are numerous studies on the importance of trust in international (and interstate) relations, and some of them may occasionally be pertinent, even though the writer of this review is inclined to think that interests carry far more weight than a quality that is rather more moral than political. Ronald Reagan's remark comes to mind: "Trust but verify." But the real fault of this work lies in its outrageously partisan character, and in the end, despite his wide coverage, Michael Tai has little to tell us about the present, and even less about the future, relations between Beijing and Washington, or between their respective societies.

Taking his inspiration from the social behaviourism of Alexander Wendt, Tai tells us in his introductory Chapter 1 that, in his view, the notion of trust consists of four key elements: history, interests, structures, and empathy. That may be so. But he offers us little explanation of how the state integrates these four conditions to transform them into policies. Then, in Chapter 2, he lays out how the Americans perceive themselves and how they perceive China, which he follows with a parallel consideration of China's perceptions. The main idea that emerges from this is that the United States is far less well-disposed towards the People's Republic than is the latter's government and society towards that dominant global power. The basic causes for this are the Americans' ideological, racial, and religious prejudices.

After this induction into the heart of the matter, the reader is invited to consider the opposition said to exist between the perspectives of Beijing and Washington in three areas: namely climate change, the global financial crisis, and international security.

With regard to the first of these, it quickly becomes clear that the writer sticks closely to the Chinese government's official pronouncements to the effect that China has the right to pollute as much as Western governments have been allowed to since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. By contrast, his arguments in Chapter 4 are more diffi-

cult to follow when he stigmatises the Obama Administration's "cold war" spirit and makes it the main culprit in the failure of the 2009 Copenhagen climate conference (p. 90). In any case, subsequent events have brought new factors to light that contradict some of the author's views: in fact, the agreement reached in 2014 between the American president and his Chinese counterpart in Beijing throws considerable doubt on the approach adopted by the Chinese authorities five years earlier.

Michael Tai is more convincing in Chapter 4, when he deals with the global financial crisis of 2007-2008. This is probably the least uninteresting part of the book. In it he compares the Chinese and American views of the crisis. Despite his diatribes against the two lobbies identified as the "market fundamentalists" and the Washington Consensus, without any nuanced distinction between them, and despite his unmitigated praise of the PRC's "non-ideological pragmatism," he can do little but note their many points of agreement on the causes of the crisis, especially the excessive deregulation of the financial markets. Admittedly, among the American analysts he is able to pick out certain conservatives who exaggerate China's role in the rapid development of the crisis. But on the whole, what his analysis reveals is the frustration common to many Chinese at their own credulity with regard to the banking know-how of their Nemesis (p. 123).

The third case study is without doubt the weakest. The US is said to be intrinsically hegemonic, while China is traditionally defensive, as the Great Wall bears witness. But Chapter 5 ends nonetheless with the following admonition: "The full significance of the changing hegemonies in modern times lies not just in the end of the 'American century' but in the close of five centuries of Western and Caucasian domination. It marks the conclusion of white supremacy" (p. 164). Does this suggest that a new hegemon, perhaps more "benevolent" but nonetheless powerful and possibly just as racist, is destined to replace the other one?

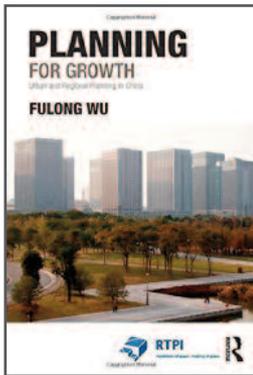
To conclude, Tai serves up a well-known dish from Beijing's propaganda menu: we know you far better than you know us! (pp. 187-188). That explains the lack of mutual trust. Moving swiftly over the opacity of the Chinese political system and more slowly over the attractions of the American way of life, the writer concludes that the Chinese government ought to strengthen its soft power and tell its own "success story" better; in short, Sino-American misunderstandings boil down to a vast communication problem.

What do we learn from this book? As we have seen, very little that we did not know already. Yet it is useful, because it shows the continuing wide gap between Chinese and American perceptions of the relations between Beijing and Washington, and to a certain extent those of the West as a whole. Moreover, being obsessed by the US like many mainland Chinese, Tai makes scant reference to Europe in his reflections. He is content to throw light on the diversity of American opinions on China, but he tells us nothing about the debates or differences of opinion between the Chinese themselves. In short, Michael Tai's book is quite representative

of the rising power of China and its strengthening sense of destiny, presided over by Xi Jinping since 2012.

■ Translated by Jonathan Hall.

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**Fulong Wu,**  
**Planning for Growth: Urban and Regional Planning in China,**  
New York & London, Routledge,  
RTPI Library Series, 2015, 248 pp.

## NICOLAS DOUAY

Fulong Wu, professor at the Bartlett School of Planning at University College London, is one of the foremost experts on China's urban development and spatial planning. His latest work is bound to become a reference text offering a large panorama of transformations in urban and regional planning in China since the twentieth century. Taking a deep historical perspective, the book examines the evolution of institutional frameworks and actors as well as the content of spatial planning policies. The book's main focus is on changes in urban and regional planning practices. At first gradually marginalised and discredited with the advent of the communist regime, these practices resumed from the late 1970s as the country opened up. The book's main thesis is the idea that spatial planning has become a key element in the process of urbanisation and economic growth. Thus, whereas in the West, spatial planning has often been seen as an enemy of economic development by proponents of neo-liberalism, in China, it is their greatest ally.

The book is divided into seven chapters dealing with the main historical periods as well as thematic issues. Numerous examples and case studies illustrate the arguments and help better understand contemporary spatial planning practices.

Chapter 1 underlines the existence of ancient practices of urban planning in China. Traditionally enclosed by walls, the cities were founded according to rules inspired by geomancy and *fengshui*. The Republic's establishment in 1911 opened up a propitious period for the development of urban planning in the largest agglomerations such as Shanghai or the then capital, Nanjing. Western influence is evident in modernised architecture and the construction of satellite towns in the periphery of big cities.

Chapter 2 examines the socialist period from 1949 until 1984, the year when urban reforms and regulations on urban planning were adopted. In the 1950s, spatial planning policies were Soviet-influenced and led to monumental architecture and the adoption of five-year plans. Spatial planning's main mission was to encourage and assist industrial development. After the disastrous "Great Leap Forward," planning stood accused

of having adopted unrealistic projects before being totally side-lined during the Cultural Revolution. Plans were abandoned in both big cities and small towns. It was only after 1978 and China's opening that an urban planning practice gradually re-emerged.

This resumption is the subject of Chapter 3, which deals with the organisation of the planning system following the adoption of a law on urban planning in 1990, one of whose main features was the transfer of competence to local authorities. There are three parallel plans in the five-year period: an urban and rural plan, a land use plan, and a socio-economic development plan. Each of these plans is overseen by a separate commission or ministry, which no doubt poses problems in coordinating objectives and resources.

The new planning system of 1990 is discussed in detail in Chapter 4, which notes the entrepreneurial turn in spatial planning. The planning practice has become less formal and more conceptual, especially in its forms of representation of a territorial project. This shift from spatial planning centred on resource allocation towards a more strategic form renders spatial planning into a tool at the service of development. In this sense, spatial planning is situated at the interface between the state and the market. It becomes an essential support for growth by providing space that would become the basis for the country's economic expansion.

Chapter 5 deals with the organisation of the planning system, with particular attention to changes in the state's role and its articulation through different local levels. The Pearl River Delta and the Yangzi Delta, which are the most dynamic regions economically, receive special attention. The study of different examples shows how the practice of urban planning by local governments helps justify an expansionist approach over the central administration in order to overcome regulatory constraints and seize new growth opportunities.

This economic growth focus of urban planning is the subject of Chapter 6, which examines the pro-development orientation of Chinese planning by discussing urban planning in new cities and eco-cities. Building new cities is a classic feature of Chinese spatial planning. As far back as 1948, Shanghai's metropolitan plan envisaged the construction of satellite towns. These urbanisation projects symbolise the pro-development orientation of Chinese planning and today take the form of mega projects. The construction of eco-cities, meanwhile, highlights the attempt to give effect to a sustainability accent in urban planning. However, the practical reality is that these projects are subject to contingencies of local power politics and investors' criteria of real estate profitability.

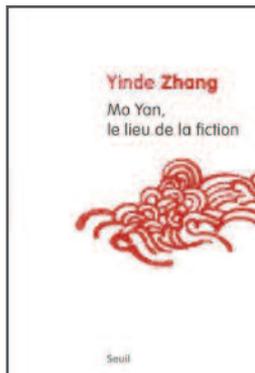
The final chapter analyses the impact of pro-market transition on spatial planning. The role of public authorities has been reduced, especially their ability to allocate resources, and has been partly replaced by market mechanisms. Since the 1990s, there has been a proliferation of plans lacking legal basis while aiming to promote development. This process cannot be attributed solely to the intensity of economic growth but is also due to the very nature of the Chinese practice of spatial planning. Wu offers three explanations for this practice. First, planning survived this transition period, as it was able to adapt to the new market context and became an instrument for territorial marketing. Second, the adoption of market mechanisms posed new social and environmental challenges necessitating the implementation of spatial planning and development policies. The third explanation is that market mechanisms were introduced in China in order to enlarge the scope of capital accumulation rather than to reduce the state's dominant role. Thus it is planning in favour of growth rather than of

the market, as the state remains at the centre of regulatory mechanisms. With this last explanation, Wu returns to the book's main thesis: contrary to Western neo-liberal vision, Chinese town planning is not an enemy of growth but its main tool.

This book will be welcomed by scholars and students interested in China and who wish to understand one of the key elements of China's transition. Scholars and students of urban planning may also find in it elements for reflection and comparison on changes in the styles of urban planning in its theoretical and practical dimensions so as to better understand the reality and process of urbanisation in China and elsewhere.

■ Translated by N. Jayaram.

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**Yinde Zhang,  
Mo Yan, le lieu de la fiction  
(Mo Yan, the Place of Fiction),**  
Paris, Seuil, 2014, 319 pp.

## FANNY FONTAINE

After publishing many works on contemporary Chinese literature, such as *Le monde romanesque chinois au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle: modernités et identités* (The World of Chinese Fiction in the Twentieth Century: Modernities and Identities), *Le Roman chinois moderne 1918-1949* (The Modern Chinese Novel, 1918-1949), and *Littérature comparée et perspectives chinoises* (Comparative Literature and Chinese Perspectives), Yinde Zhang, professor of Chinese Studies and director of research at the Centre d'études et de recherches comparatistes (Centre of comparative studies and research) at Sorbonne Nouvelle University-Paris 3, turns his focus here to a contemporary Chinese writer already known to the public: Mo Yan, winner of the 2012 Nobel Prize in Literature.

A former member of the People's Liberation Army and a native of Shandong, this writer, whose pen-name means "don't speak" (莫言 *mo yan*), has already been the focus of abundant critical works centring on various analyses that very often veer between two stumbling blocks: excessive particularisation or excessive generalisation. While some concentrate solely on his biography, others identify him with an exotic image of China, while still others paint him as the paragon of contemporary Chinese or world literature. Nevertheless, part of the academic critique has turned towards the study of certain thematic and formal elements of his work, for example its connection with history and memory, its social critique of contemporary China, and the formal procedures of writing.

In this context, Yinde Zhang, who has worked extensively on the notion of identity, adopts an original approach, offering us a monograph that views Mo Yan's work from a spatial perspective. The title of the book, "Mo Yan, le lieu de la fiction" (Mo Yan, the place of fiction), gives already an idea of the importance of territory in this study, as the focus is placed on one particular location, Gaomi, the writer's birthplace.

The appeal of this work lies in its positioning at the crossroads between the local and the universal, identity and otherness. Indeed, Yinde Zhang analyses Mo Yan's work "in its three-dimensional aspect encompassing memory, critique and the imaginary" (p. 18). In other words, he studies the latter's work as a place that represents a space of the body (bodily memory), a critical space, and a space for the imaginary. To study Mo Yan is to "explore his work with fresh eyes, at the point where history meets fiction, the real meets the imaginary, and the local meets the global" (p. 25). It means "stepping away from one's birthplace" – as the writer himself stated in 1992 – leaving one's place of origin, Gaomi, and studying all of its symbolic dimensions, by means of which Mo Yan has transformed a real place into a literary and imaginary non-place, free of any political or literary ideology: "Gaomi is a place of the word, as much as a place of fiction. It is a reinvented territory" (p. 12).

Therefore, in an approach that is both monographic and chronological, Yinde Zhang has studied Mo Yan's "place of fiction" at several levels: he first looks at the writer's creative space, examining the sensory, rational, and imaginary dimension of his work, before viewing each work as an independent territory within this space.

The first part, "L'œuvre en contexte" (The work in context) therefore sets out a symbolic process that can be read throughout the work. It starts with Mo Yan's biography, not from a biographical perspective, but to emphasise the extent to which the autobiographical place acts as a foundation from which a profusion of stories emerges, feeding on legends, imagination, and on an historical or indeed mythical time depth: that of China. Gaomi is the original place, a starting point for a fictionalisation of history. It is the place of expression of the body, of matter, of the earth, at the infinitely subtle level of individual sensitivity, or at the mythical level of outlandish family sagas. Yinde Zhang leads us ably through Mo Yan's "creative and sensory journey."

In a remarkably structured work, the author next turns to Gaomi as the place of a controversial statement that reveals Mo Yan's critical power, in terms of both the comical and the ironic. The literary place then becomes a theatre stage where the writer can use his detached voice to undermine any form of power. This subversive statement first manifests itself in the oral and vernacular dimension of the writing, which offers a return to a language that fluctuates between the spoken and written word, that expresses the rhythm of the earth and in which the subject enjoys freedom of speech. This gives the reader access to the language of the people, but reinvented.

Finally, Yinde Zhang dwells on an inescapable trait of the writer: the subversive use of irony that colours all established social discourse, from state ideology to the literary *doxa*: no matter how nationalist, in favour of an increased birth rate, or epic the language might be, all passes through Mo Yan's filter of exuberant and ferocious verve.

The second part, "Une topographie romanesque" (A novel-by-novel topography), studies Mo Yan's novels as independent islands linked symbolically into a network, shifting from the journey taken by the writer's creative identity to the journey of the works themselves, the frame of refer-

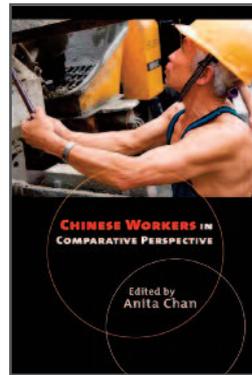
ence being biological. Indeed, Yinde Zhang has produced a detailed study of each work in its imaginary dimension, looking at the tension between the real and the supernatural, the rational and the fantastic. The aim of the critique is to show that, by depicting the violence of the body, Mo Yan questions the connection between the individual and history and attempts, perhaps, to restore a form of vital power or humanism to a fiction that speaks of the body and of life: a *biofiction*.

The study first looks at *The Republic of Wine: A Novel*, a virulent satire of an abject society. Indeed, this was the first of Mo Yan's novels to recount the violence of relations between the individual and the state, in the metaphorical form of cannibalism "to textualise the abjection, this rejection outside the body" (p. 118). The omnipresence of the lower functions of the body allows a primitive power to re-emerge, blowing away all notions of decorum. Yinde Zhang next considers *Big Breasts & Wide Hips*, which draws a paradoxical picture of the motherland, in which Jintong's mother symbolises China's sacrifices over the course of the series of destructive utopias it has experienced through history. Bodily violence is once more the theme in *Sandalwood Death*, which approaches the subject through a critique of a violated and colonised territory; finally, this biological dimension of the writing finds expression in *Frog*, the explicit theme of abortion, and the treating of the body as a commodity. In this case, the question of the body is once more linked to the earth, because the novel reveals the negligence of successive policies blighted by utilitarianism. Yinde Zhang shows that, from Mo Yan's point of view, from communism to liberalism, history is nothing more than a cycle that keeps repeating, an inevitable return of alienations of the body and mass executions.

After a brief conclusion that shifts the emphasis of the question of Mo Yan's controversial commitment towards a subversive writing policy, the end of the book offers an insight into the reception of the writer in France, both in the press and in the world of academic research, which makes it possible, in hindsight, to embrace the originality of Yinde Zhang's viewpoint. Instead of appraising Mo Yan's work through the prism of a culturalist or exotic vision, it considers it rather by studying how this "fictional world, with its autobiographical, memory, and mythical dimensions, breathes life into realistic and fabulous figures, while mixing in violence, cruelty, animality, the carnivalesque, the grotesque, irony, and humour. The variety of aspects in the work thus corresponds to its polymorphic and transgeneric nature: a web-like organisation is worked through the texts and genres, linking them thanks to a meaningful collection of repetitions and variations" (p. 58). Similarly, Yinde Zhang's book is organised around the motifs of the body and territory, thus sketching a literary map of Mo Yan's world.

■ Translated by Will Thornely.

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**Anita Chan (ed.),**  
**Chinese Workers in Comparative Perspective**, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2015, 296 pp.

## MING-SHO HO

China watchers generally agree that successful economic development through low-wage export has shown signs of exhaustion. Since the Labour Contract Law came into effect in 2008, labour costs have risen considerably, squeezing the profit margins of export-oriented manufacturers. Migrant workers' rights consciousness has surged, as witnessed by the Honda strike and the much publicised wave of suicides at Foxconn (a Taiwanese electronics maker) in 2010, and the strike at Yue Yuen (a Taiwanese footwear maker) in 2014, all taking place in Guangdong Province, nicknamed "China's California" for its economic significance. The visible slow-down in GDP growth has also cast doubt on the viability of the current strategy to maintain political acquiescence with improving living standards. *Chinese Workers in Comparative Perspective* is an edited volume that provides timely and comparative insight into how the working class has experienced the recent major transformation.

Anita Chan, the editor of this volume and an Australia-based veteran observer of China's workers, persuasively contends that it is time to move beyond "the fallacy of exceptionalism," since what is happening in contemporary China can also be found elsewhere. The methodological refusal to treat China's working class as a special case helps to demystify the official pretension to create "socialism with Chinese characteristics," since, as the introductory chapter eloquently argues, workers are exploited as much there as in other capitalistic countries, if not more. There is another unexplored implication. This contextualising research strategy is instrumental in debunking some naive but fashionable and influential expectations that China will evolve into a balanced and harmonious developmental pattern<sup>(1)</sup> or a unique path that combines political stability and economic growth.<sup>(2)</sup> As in nineteenth-century Britain, the contemporary world factory of China is no less ruthless to the producers who supply the globe with what millions need, the irony being that it is ruled by a party that retains nominal allegiance to the historical mission of classical Marxism.

Originating from a 2011 conference, this volume offers a sufficiently updated diagnosis of China's working class. The foreign-funded factories in maritime provinces continue to rely on labour supply from the rural hinterland, and have recently begun to hire second-generation migrant workers. That the new generation is more city-bound and less likely to identify themselves as temporary sojourners has deeper implications for class politics in the years to come. Massive lay-offs in state-owned enterprises and

1. Giovanni Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the 21st Century*, London, Verso, 2009.
2. Jacques Martin, *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order*, New York, Penguin, 2009.

the ensuing worker protests have already occurred; in fact, the state-sector share of the working population has stabilised since the 2007–2008 global financial crisis, although the new entrants tend to be casual workers. Taiwanese and Hong Kong firms specialising in labour-intensive garments and electronics continue to operate in the notorious sweatshop fashion with low wages and long hours. Despite some success in industrial upgrading, repetitive, monotonous, and low-skilled assembly line tasks continue to make up the bulk of job offers in these firms.

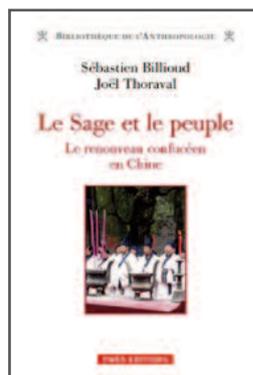
*Chinese Workers in Comparative Perspective* also sheds light on the difficult but hitherto largely successful imperatives of reconciling the conflicting demands of encouraging investment and protecting workers, which the highly-adaptive Chinese Communist regime has mastered into a political art. The Communist-controlled All-China Federation of Trade Unions has gradually been given a larger role, and its rank-and-file membership has actually increased since the turn of century. Except in the few cases where union leaders were democratically elected due to grassroots activism, “yellow unions” predominate at the enterprise level, which nevertheless has not prevented local-level unionists from playing a more assertive role in mediating industrial disputes. Persistent effort in labour legislation since the 1990s has substantially improved workers’ legal and economic status without empowering them politically. In spite of the proverbial official corruption and collusion with business, the Chinese government has not embraced an exclusionary strategy toward the working class, which has helped contain class antagonism within a manageable scope.

There are several chapters in which cross-national comparisons offer valuable insight into some contemporary puzzles. Both Japanese and German carmakers operated joint ventures in China, but the former have been more prone to industrial disputes, not only because Japanese firms are easy targets of nationalistic sentiment, but also because they are less embedded in local supply chain. As with Taiwan 30 years ago, China’s labour NGOs have offered legal aid to victimised workers. Taiwanese labour activists were organisationally linked to the democratic movement, and their political strength enabled them to build new labour unions free of government control, whereas their contemporary Chinese counterparts continue to chafe under the watchful authorities. Both Russia and China embarked on post-socialist transition in the 1980s; the sudden collapse of Russia’s Communist regime allowed union leaders to assert their political independence and enabled alternative unionism, whereas the post-Tiananmen CCP strengthened its control over unions. Vietnam is another transitional economy with entrenched Communist rule. Compared with Chinese workers, Vietnamese are less overworked and but also paid less. While Vietnamese unionists have engaged in sector-specific collective bargaining, Chinese workers are more likely to resort to wildcat strikes to improve their treatment. An interesting chapter on soccer ball production brings India, Pakistan, and China together, with the sombre conclusion that the corporate social responsibility campaign has been largely ineffective, since local manufacturers have been able to shield their problematic production from public scrutiny by using home-based child labour in South Asia and prison labour in China.

This volume demonstrates the rich repertoire of comparative labour studies, which can proceed on the firm, sectoral, regional, or national level. Methodologically speaking, most comparativists adopt the design of “most similar system method” by selecting more similar country cases. In this regard, two chapters that compare the effect of neoliberal globalisation in the United States and the legalisation of strikes in Australia appear unex-

pected and unconventional, since China shares little common ground with these two advanced capitalist countries. Moreover, with the on-going economic transition from world factory to world market, service-sector employment is quickly eclipsing that in manufacturing. This volume mostly looks at factory manual workers, arguably the classical research topic in labour research; more studies are needed on service workers and skilled professionals in order to bring out a fuller picture of China’s working class.

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**Sébastien Billioud and Joël Thoraval,**  
**Le Sage et le peuple. Le renouveau confucéen en Chine**  
**(The Sage and the People: The Confucian Revival in China),**  
Paris, CNRS Éditions, 2014, 436 pp.

## JI ZHE

This book, which has been recently translated into English,<sup>(1)</sup> sets out a new paradigm for studies on Confucianism. Unlike currently available works, which despite their high quality tend to reduce the complex “Confucian” phenomenon (an all too accommodating, not to say ambiguous, label) to various partial aspects such as philosophy, ethics, official ideology, or worship practices, this book stands out for its approach to the phenomenon as a whole, which enables it to avoid reductionism. Based on ethnographic material garnered over several years’ research in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, the two authors provide a panoramic description of the many social expressions of Confucianism in the first decade of the twenty-first century, along with a critical analysis of their moral and political preconditions. The two authors call these manifold expressions “popular Confucianism,” which is a term borrowed from Chinese activists but in no way refers to a purely anti-elitist or simply unofficial movement. On the contrary, elitist initiatives and governmental interventions are closely involved and are therefore given equal weight by the two authors. Their insistence on the “popular” aspects corresponds above all to their purely heuristic stance. This enables them to take into account the polarity of a “popular” component, which on the one hand comprises a value term and a complex of many-faceted forces, and on the other the image of a “sage,” which having been refracted through many cultural inputs in the past and badly abused in the twentieth century, continues to haunt Chinese modernity. But there is also an anthropological ambition here: to study “the confrontation of individuals from popular social milieus with their image of Confucius and, in

1. Sébastien Billioud and Joël Thoraval, *The Sage and the People: The Confucian Revival in China*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, 352 pp.

addition, to identify the practical lessons for life that they attempt to restore and put into practice" (p. 18).

This rich material is carefully organised into three sections corresponding to the educational, religious, and political dimensions of the phenomenon being studied, and this tripartite division itself amounts to a clarification as it displaces the customary framework. The first section, comprising three chapters, deals with educational projects claiming to be based on "Confucianism." After a brief survey of the development of the role of education in Chinese society during the first half of the twentieth century, the authors expound on various attempts to re-institutionalise Confucian education in the early 2000s, from the "Confucian studies" and "national studies" projects in the universities to the movements for "children reading the classics" launched by the Taiwanese. To these they add the "traditional" education offered by private schools as an alternative to official education, as well as associations for cultural self-cultivation among adults. They also study the appropriation of similar projects by private firms and government bodies. Finally, the authors show how these different educational projects (particularly those outside university structures) contain an implicit anti-intellectualism that gives weight to "the people's" capacity to incorporate a traditional form of knowledge, rather than the theoretical studies of the elite.

The second section tackles the religious dimension of Confucianism, starting with individual case studies in the fourth chapter, which show how "conversion" to Confucianism comes about, and is narrated through lived experience in which Buddhist faith may sometimes play an intermediary role. The fifth and sixth chapters constitute a study of the "religious question" posed by the contemporary Confucian phenomenon: namely, why is it difficult to correlate its actual initiatives with the imported Western norms for classifying a "religion," and what are the terms used by its proponents to make their claim for the religious nature of their undertakings? Attempts at a religious institutionalisation of Confucianism in contemporary China, which form part of its ongoing history, are diverse and creative, as well as problematic. While projects aimed at restoring Confucianism as a "state religion" or a "civil religion" are still largely theoretical, some new religious movements (especially the *Yiguandao*) have already recycled Confucian elements among their fundamental tenets. Yet none of these attempts has gained legal recognition from the PRC state, and there is still a long way to go before reaching a consensus on the relationship between Confucianism and politics, or between Confucianism and other religions.

The four chapters comprising the third section begin by following the shifts in the cult of Confucius, from his "deritualisation" under Republican and Maoist rule to the return of the "sacrificial rites" in the reform period. This is followed by a detailed report on the development of the Festival of Confucius orchestrated in 2007 by the Chinese government, in which the authors draw attention to both official handiwork and initiatives deemed to arise from "popular" sources. In the first case, the aim is to make use of Confucius without any real respect for Confucianism, which reveals the continuing "Maoist *habitus*" or mind-set of political campaigning. The second set of initiatives embodies a historical ideal that goes far beyond the current political horizons by seeking to ground their legitimacy in recognition by the people. These two ways of restoring ritual are both mutually competitive and mutually supportive. The last chapter compares politico-religious rituals in Mainland China and Taiwan, and analyses the different possible ways of correlating the traditional cosmology with modern poli-

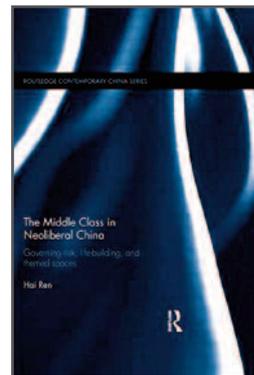
tics. This comparison allows the authors to give further consideration to the socio-political implications of pronouncements on the religious nature of Confucianism that they discussed in the second section.

Finally, in the epilogue the two authors throw light on recent developments in popular Confucianism in its quest for continuity and autonomy. They argue that the state, Buddhism, and the associations promoting syncretism are without a doubt the major external factors exerting pressure on the reshaping of the relationship between the Sage and the people.

Thanks to its richness and its detailed descriptions (supported by a large number of photos taken *in situ*), as well as the pertinence of its insightful and lucid analyses, this erudite but accessible work is invaluable for any reader concerned with the attitudes currently prevalent in the "Chinese world." In 2015 it was awarded the Bernheim Prize in the history of religions by the French Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, and it sets a new benchmark and encouragement for the anthropological study of China as it faces the challenge of grasping the direction taken by the great traditions in an immense society undergoing transition. The authors' proposal for an "anthropological reflection on the present" (p. 400) will be an inspiration for historians of both Confucianism and Chinese religion in general, because there is no doubt that the "popular" movement and the relations between the state, the Sage, and the people studied in this work have long been present in the ancient traditions of China.

■ Translated by Jonathan Hall.

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**Hai Ren,**  
**The Middle Class in Neoliberal China: Governing Risk, Life-Building, and Themed Spaces,**

London, New York, Routledge, 2013,  
xvi & 192 pp.

## MARTIN MINOST

The Chinese middle classes – and the question of their definition – are a recurring subject of research. In recent years, many sociologists and anthropologists from all over the world have tackled this thorny question. These include, among others, Jean-Louis Rocca, to whom we owe translations of work on the subject by well-known Chinese scholars such as Li Chunling and Zhou Xiaohong,<sup>(1)</sup> as well as recent work by David Goodman.<sup>(2)</sup>

1. Jean-Louis Rocca (ed.), *La Société chinoise vue par ses sociologues. Migrations, villes, classes moyennes, drogue, sida* (Chinese Society as Seen by its Sociologists: Migration, Cities, Middle Classes, Drugs and AIDS), Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2008, 319 pp. (see Chapters 1, 4 and 5).
2. David S.G. Goodman & Minglu Chen (eds), *Middle Class China: Identity and Behaviour*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 2013, 204 pp.; David S.G. Goodman, *Class in Contemporary China*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2014, 233 pp.

However, Professor Ren's book, published in 2013, offers an analytical perspective that is radically different from that of most existing work on the subject. The author does not seek to define and mark off the middle class by means of more or less arbitrary statistical categories, or through qualitative criteria such as consumption patterns, sense of belonging, and other lifestyle analyses.

Basing himself on the concept of the "device" (*dispositif*) developed by Michel Foucault – which is to say the complex of means, discourses, practices, techniques, and institutions used by a government for the purposes of control – the author analyses the "middle class" as a strategy of the Chinese state to promote a harmonious "middle class society," and to manage, educate, and control the Chinese population. To analyse this soft control, the anthropologist has carried out much field research, mainly in the Chinese Ethnic Culture Park in Beijing, in order to observe how an institution serving the state inculcates individuals with models of behaviour that correspond to the image of a middle class put forward by that state.

In order to demonstrate his point, Ren's book follows a simple and effective scheme. In his introduction, the author begins by defining Chinese society as a risk society in Ulrich Beck's meaning of the term, and refers back to several theories of social class that precede his own perspective. He then introduces the relevance of Michel Foucault's theory in analysing neoliberal forms of self-construction of individuals ("subjectification") in a risk society.

The first chapter is a presentation of the evolution of the Chinese state and its necessary changes in the face of upheavals linked both to the handover of Hong Kong and to the economic liberalisation of China. Indeed, since the composition of China's population has changed, the discourse of the state has also had to evolve in order to better represent this population politically. The author reviews the adaptations that the state has had to make in its discourse in order to integrate the new social classes, which were reviled during the Maoist era.

The next two chapters focus on the liberalisation in the field of culture through two institutions: ethnic museums and television. Initially totally controlled by the state, these two institutions, according to Ren, have been opened up to private management but continue to serve state ideology by presentation and programming that is closely monitored by CCP members. This "neoliberalisation" of institutions, nonetheless subject to strong state authority, has made it possible, according to the author, to mix consumer society with the education of the population through the field of entertainment and presentation, which he calls "imagineering," a term that could be defined as image engineering aimed at controlling the consumption patterns of individuals.

Chapter Four provides a more detailed analysis of the process of management and manipulation of individuals, on the basis of surveys conducted in the built environment of the Ethnic Park. Indeed, the park area is designed so that, through the presentation in space ("theming") and time of the culture of the various ethnic minorities, clients are placed in behavioural situations that are specific to a middle class (kinds of consumption, secure spaces, etc.). As Ren sees them, the norms and rules of the park shape consumers in order to make them into middle-class subjects.

The last two chapters, one on consumer photography practices and one on the backgrounds and social situations, whether precarious or not, of some individuals, serve to demonstrate that all members of society are affected by the discourse and techniques implemented by the state and cul-

tural enterprises, and all of them are constructed in relation to the middle class model being promoted.

Thus, Ren's perspective is very interesting. Although it is not a question of defining the criteria that make it possible to rank individuals among the middle class, one finds in his analysis factors usually put forward in the study of the middle classes: capitalist modes of consumption, the commodification of image and culture, and the analogy between the park and the secure area of gated communities that allows the author to classify the PRC among neoliberal societies. But the new perspective remains an analysis of the middle class as a manipulative image and a discourse that facilitates the stability of the social order. From this point of view, the middle class no longer includes only certain members of society who are eligible because of possessing certain criteria, but affects and influences the entire population. Although the author does not use the term, there is a renewed avenue of research for the study of aspirations and their impact on social relations between individuals.

However, Ren's demonstration is not always entirely convincing, especially in its lack of comparison with other situations of everyday life, that is to say, ones less "extraordinary" than a visit to the Ethnic Culture Park. Indeed, the objective set out by the anthropologist was to demonstrate that Chinese society is guided in all circumstances towards a new state ideological model, even by cultural enterprises released from state management, and is therefore potentially depoliticised. However, the focussing of his investigation on the Ethnic Park and museums necessarily distorts the results, because debates and political intentions cannot be absent from the issue of minority nationalities, which directly affect the unity of the country. What about situations in everyday life where the political is effectively absent?

In addition, there is sometimes a certain naivety on the part of the author in the face of consumers' willingness to integrate with the norms and regulations of the park when they are reprimanded by the guards for inappropriate behaviour. What happens once they come back out of the park enclosure? Ren seems to forget the ability of individuals, whether or not they are Chinese, to ignore the rules. Also, it seems to me that the anthropologist puts too much emphasis on the overdetermination of the control model he perceives, and places too much confidence in its effectiveness. It would have been necessary to follow these consumers at greater length outside of the extraordinary situation of the park in order to observe and prove the real embedding of a model.

■ Translated by Michael Black.

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**Paul Morris, Naoko Shimazu,  
and Edward Vickers (eds.),  
Imagining Japan in Post-war East  
Asia: Identity Politics, Schooling  
and Popular Culture,**  
London, Routledge, 2013, 264 pp.

## YVES RUSSELL

Celebrations marking 70 years since Japan's capitulation in the summer of 1945, featuring a major military parade organised for the occasion in China, have revealed the extent to which memories of the war with the Japanese archipelago pose challenges of varying magnitude among East Asian countries. While Japan's image as an aggressor is often invoked by the governments of neighbouring countries, especially in the context of current territorial disputes, it is not the only image they use and/or is in vogue among people in these countries.

Historians and specialists in education at the University of London, Paul Morris, Naoko Shimazu, and Edward Vickers (the latter being a noted expert on education in Asia and currently affiliated with Kyushu University in Japan) have put together 11 contributions shedding light on changes in the way Japan is represented in different countries and territories in East Asia (China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore, the Philippines, and Malaysia). The book consists of two main parts: the first deals with the way in which Japan is represented in "popular culture and state propaganda" and the second focuses on representations of Japan in school (mainly history) textbooks, deemed "official discourse." An epilogue by Shi Guopeng, who teaches history in an elite Beijing school, concludes these studies from a different perspective with a reflection on the trilateral encounters among history teachers from China, Japan, and South Korea, in which he took part. His bitter account echoes that of Soon-Won Park<sup>(1)</sup> regarding a common textbook project of the three countries, *A History that Opens the Future*. The two authors conclude that without a profound change in the national political and institutional situations, the transmission of a certain image of Japan by the media or teaching will always be subject to the interests of the authorities in place.

The book's aim is to examine the ways in which representations of Japan as an imagined "Other" may or may not serve in moulding national identities in the region. The historical approach used here helps discern the changes and the political, institutional and cultural reasons behind the evolution in Japan's image in the countries studied. In the book's introduction, the editors identify four models of the Japanese "Other": the "normative Other," or the model to be followed; the "dominant Other," or enemy/counter-model Other; that of "alternative Other," often in the interplay of triangular relations as with China and Taiwan; and that of "distant Other," with little significance in the construction of national identity.

Starting with the observation that Japan's image is strongly linked to its role in the Second World War, more than half of the book's chapters deal with representations of Japanese occupation or memories of the conflict with the archipelago. Kinnia Yau Shuk-ting (Chapter 4), analysing "good

Japanese in Chinese (Sino-Japanese) war films," shows how a more contrasted vision of Japanese enemies has emerged, mainly since the 1990s. While the bloodthirsty and violent Japanese "demon" (*guizi*) image holds sway in dominant media, the Japanese soldier's unilateral image has been softened and toned down in films seeking more international audiences, at the same time transmitting the image of a more indulgent China capable of empathy. Chapter 5, by Karl Ian Uy Cheng Chua, focuses on the Philippines, where the image of Japanese soldiers in comic books has evolved from a Manichean vision (heroic Filipino guerrilla seeing off Japanese troublemakers) towards a more contrasting one when issues linked to reparations were resolved and when issues of official corruption, economic growth, and civil dissent arose. Finally, from the 1970s, echoing the previous chapter's precedent, there appeared the odd Filipino traitor and a good Japanese soldier that the former aggressor country's economic development reinforced. After these two positive changes in Japan's image comes an opposing trajectory in South Korea. The fine and fascinating analysis (Chapter 6 by Jung-sun N. Han) of the fate of the Japanese forces' former headquarters finally destroyed in 1995 after having served as the Korean government's offices and later a museum, helps in understanding the political, architectural, and also symbolic (such as geomancy) issues surrounding the Japanese occupation.

In Part II, four of the six chapters examine the ways in which the occupation and the war with Japan are dealt with in school textbooks in China (Caroline Rose), Malaysia (Helen Ting), Singapore (Khatera Khamsi and Christine Han), and the Philippines (Mark Maca and Paul Morris). In China, according to Rose, despite notable variations among different editions, reducing the treatment of the war in history textbooks throughout programmes has led to proportionally highlighting war atrocities, presenting the Japanese as the dominant "Extreme Other." This unity of tone in the Chinese centralised state is not to be found in Malaysia (Chapter 10), where there is no national memory of Japanese occupation but collective memories linked to ethnic groups. In the Philippines (Chapter 12), the state's weak control and poor quality of school textbooks have prevented the emergence of a coherent account leading to the creation of a national identity sentiment; on the other hand, the account of Japanese occupation has merely served to de-dramatize Spanish and American colonisations. In Singapore (Chapter 11), the idealised image of Japan is used ambivalently: at once enemy and model in the textbooks, but model of governance for the authorities in power.

Among contributions not specifically devoted to Japan's aggressor image, that of Simon Avenell (Chapter 2) analyses the manner in which the Singapore government has built an image of Japan and uses it through the "Learn from Japan" campaign launched in the late 1970s. The campaign's impact on Japan's image among the people may not be clear, but Avenell says: "More significant in the long term (...) was the Learn from Japan campaign's ideological utility in teaching people about being productive, patriotic, and compliant Singaporeans and in legitimizing the persistence of authoritarian governance and neoliberal developmentalist economics. 'Japan' was a useful tool for Singaporean leaders in the formulation of strategies to short-circuit labour militancy and political dissent (...)" (p. 45). Taiwan of the 1990s likewise idealised a Japan far from the social reality on the ground, an image magnified in manga comics and deemed "popular culture." There is a triangular relationship with the United States and China, particularly dealt with

1. Soon-Won Park, "A History that Opens the Future," in Gi-Wook Shin, Daniel C. Sneider (eds.), *History Textbooks and the Wars in Asia*, New York, Routledge, 2011, 312 pp.

by Alisa Jones (Chapter 9). Her brilliant analysis of the manner in which Taiwanese history textbooks have long treated the island's relations with Japan and the Chinese mainland shows how the construction of the Taiwanese identity has necessitated adjustments and rearrangements in the statuses of otherness of the two neighbours, the PRC gradually taking Japan's place as the dominant "Other." Her analysis is echoed by that of Paul Morris and Edward Vickers regarding Hong Kong. The situation in the Special Administrative Region (SAR) is somewhat of an inverse mirror image of that in Taiwan, as the account on Japan is obliged to be based on the mainland's and to serve national unity.

The various chapters of this volume present an interesting and diversified study of the instrumentalisation of different gradations of otherness in the process of political legitimation or of identity building. Despite a focus on the Japanese occupation adding a touch of bias, the situation seems rather disquieting for Japan, which suffers from a mostly negative image, especially among its immediate neighbours, China and South Korea. The situation seems better in countries and territories where state legitimacy or policies may rely on a supposed Japanese model or where other countries may fill the role of the dominant "Other" or enemy.

■ Translated by N. Jayaram.

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**Yu Zhejun,**  
**Shenming yu shimin. Minguo shiqi Shanghai diqu yingshen saihui yanjiu (Deities and City Dwellers: Research on Popular Processions in Shanghai during the Republican Era),** Shanghai, Shanghai Joint Publishing Company, 2014, 312 pp.

## BENOÎT VERMANDER

This work discusses the make-up of civil society in Shanghai in the time of the Republic of China and the role played in this process by popular religion. The importance of this question clearly goes beyond mere historical interest, which is one of the reasons why this excellent study deserves attention.

Focusing first on the title, two points should be highlighted. The first is, of course, the use of the Chinese term *shimin* 市民 which, on the author's own admission, retains a certain vagueness in Chinese, and which can be translated indiscriminately today as "citizen" or "city dweller"; the doctoral thesis behind this work, which was written in German, uses the term *Bürger*, which does little to clarify the translation to be favoured. At this point, we can look to Rousseau's admonition: "Most people take a town for a city and a *bourgeois* for a citizen. They do not know that although the houses make the town, it is the citizens that make the city." Nevertheless, historically, the Chinese term *shimin* originally referred to "civil" and "citizen": *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, the term introduced into modern political

thinking by Hegel, is translated in Marxist texts as *shimin shehui*. However, when referring to "civil society," the term *gongmin shehui* is today used most frequently, at least in mainland China, where the expression refers to "public affairs," insofar as civil society, in the sense attributed to it in this case, is that which participates, of its own accord, in public affairs. In any case, in the work relevant to us here, it is "citizens" – and those of the Chinese city at the peak of "modernity" – that are potentially the actors of a civil society in gestation. It therefore appears to be very difficult to separate the two connotations of the term.

The second point that needs highlighting relates to the expression *yingshen saihui* 迎神赛会. This refers to the processions in which the statue of a god is carried, thus marking its territory, and it is therefore the inhabitants of this territory who welcome the deity's visit. The author correctly notes that although the character *sai* 赛 has today taken on the meaning, above all, of competition, the expression *saishen* 赛神 alludes to an offering or thanksgiving sacrifice (p. 60). The type of processions referred to here concerns local deities, responsible for a territory; the departure from a given territory (a temple or hall) and the journey through a marked space at fixed times of the year form the heart of the ritual in question. It is the inhabitants of the given territory, rather than the clerics, who organise and participate in the ritual.

The work opens along the lines of Paul Katz, who suggested that studying civil society and the formation of a public space in China cannot disregard the study of popular religion (see *Demon Hords and Burning Boats: The Cult of Marshall Wen in Late Imperial Chekiang*, a line of analysis rejected by Yves Chevrier, for example, for whom the emergence of civil society cannot be reduced to any independent manifestation of the social with regard to the political). Kenneth Dean's studies of ritual spaces and civil society are also recalled a little later in the work.

The first part, which probably holds less interest for the foreign reader, focuses on the Western concept of civil society and on its applicability (or not) to the Chinese context. Concerning this final point, the studies of Rowe, Rankin, and Wakeman are described in detail. Although the question remains open as to the possibility, extent, and mode of China's adoption of the Western model of civil society, the author defends the heuristic value of this model to account for societal changes in China. Based on these preliminary reviews, Yu Zhejun elaborates the theory that popular religion is the favoured mode of self-organisation in Chinese society, demonstrated above all by the way in which festivals and temples are managed and overseen (p. 56).

This theory introduces the second part, which starts with a history of popular processions, the substance of which is evoked above. Their enactment is then situated in the context of Shanghai in the time of the Republic of China, with its particularities both geographical (some of these processions take place on waterways) and legal/political (in particular a thorough review of relations between the state and religions). The choreography of the procession follows fairly general rules (opening rites, dances, interventions by "penitents," and transportation of the palanquin or palanquins of the gods). During the period in question (1912-1949), approximately 200 processions took place each year in the territories that today constitute Shanghai (pp. 107-121). A substantial chapter is given over to the three annual processions organised from the temple of the god of walls and moats (*chenghuangmiao*) in the old city of Shanghai. The city god, worship of whom originated with the gods of the land, was incorporated into state institutions and sacrifices when the founder of the Ming dynasty, Taizu (r. 1368-1399), made the creation of a temple dedicated to him compul-

sory in every county and prefecture. In Shanghai, an existing temple was converted for this purpose. The fire of 1924 led to major rebuilding work in 1926-1927. Yu Zhejun sees this as an important step in the assertion of a civil society taking the place of a failing local government and organising itself into a highly structured committee overseeing the upkeep of popular religious practices, the organisation of charitable works, and the provision of a sustainable financial base. At the same time, it strove to equip itself with statutes and to obtain explicit legal recognition, although this did not head off repeated conflicts with the local government, which can be explained by the latter's control of financial resources (pp. 195-198).

This analysis is supplemented by that of a few conflicts that occurred when processions passed through territories. For example, in Pudong, some participants led actions against the Catholic Church building in Zhangjialou, records of which date back to 1744. The roots of this conflict can be traced back to the long-standing refusal of the Catholics to contribute to the costs of organising the festivals (pp. 227-229). On other occasions, in particular in the outlying districts, the population came into direct (and sometimes violent) conflict with the local authorities concerning the legality, the type of activities authorised, and the expenditure resulting from the processions.

The conclusion attempts to give a human face to these participants in the processions, and, in particular, to retrace the way in which they organised themselves during the period in question; these organisations went beyond family and lineage; they wanted acceptance in the new legal reality (and in the "civilisation" that this reality was supposed to embody) and thus entered into a process of negotiation with the state. These new structures were supposed to be pluralistic, legal, enlightened, and self-managed. At the same time, they maintained difficult, often conflictive, relations with the local authorities. Touching towards the end on religious sociology, and in particular C. K. Yang's classic model (*Religion in Chinese Society*), the author wonders if studying popular processions and the way in which they organised themselves somehow changes the common perception of popular religion. By examining them, it is possible to transcend, if only partly, the unsatisfactory distinction between "organised" religion and "diffuse" religion. In the study of Chinese religions, the conclusions to be drawn from the observation of these highly organised groups of laymen have not yet been established.

Yu Zhejun's work offers a rich and detailed contribution to the religious and social history of Shanghai in the time of the Republic of China. His approach to civil society remains marked by the classic sociological tradition, but is little informed by political theory. Furthermore, it struggles to take root in an empirical research subject that probably remains too restricted in relation to the questions raised in the first part. Nevertheless, above and beyond the documentary interest of the work, the description of the self-organisation of local micro-societies hints at interesting perspectives with regard to the approach of contemporary society. Moreover, the role played by groups of laymen organised on a territorial basis is not necessarily restricted to the domain of traditional popular religion, and parallels could be drawn with the way in which Protestant organisations, in particular, are attempting to proceed in the present day. In another vein, the importance of the notion of "territory" and the way in which ritual processes undertake to make local territories sacred remain subjects rich in implications.

■ Translated by Will Thornely.

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## Books received

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