

Appetites: Food and Sex in Post-Socialist China

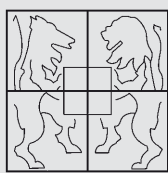
Review >
China

Starting in the 1980s, socio-economic changes in China induced an ideological shift from Maoist Puritanism to market-oriented individualism. The originality of *Appetites* lies in Farquhar's theoretical and epistemological approach to her subject: the politics of food and sex, bodies and medicine, desire and pleasure in a modernizing and globalizing China. Accessible to non-specialists, the book offers a rich overview of post-Socialist Chinese popular culture as presented in various media.



Ji Wenyu, Learning Fashion, Making Beautiful, Oil on Canvas, 114x164 cm, 2003

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A Selection Committee will meet at the end of April 2004. Those applicants selected can teach within the academic year, ie. from mid-October 2004 up until May 2005.

The selection procedure involves the following steps.

1. 2nd April 2004, deadline for receiving applications to be sent to Prof. Jean-Marie Bouissou and Prof. Christophe Jaffrelot (directors of the Asia programme) CERI, 56, rue Jacob, 75006 Paris

Applications must include a complete curriculum vitae and a teaching proposal. These application files should be sent par email to: bouissou@ceri-sciences-po.org and jaffrelot@ceri-sciences-po.org

2. 30th April 2004. Meeting of the Selection committee whose decision will be presented for the approval of the Academic Board.

The administration of the Sciences Po Asia Chair is in the hands of the Asia-Europe Centre. Those applicants selected by the Academic Board should contact its director, Dr David Camroux, Asia-Europe Centre/CERI, 56, rue Jacob 75006 Paris (david.camroux@sciences-po.fr)

By Evelyne Micollier

Appetites: Food and Sex in Post-Socialist China blurs the boundaries between many sources: popular fiction, television broadcasts, movies, popular health manuals, sex survey reports, classical erotic novels, advertisements, and observations of medical practices and daily life in urban China. All can be used, the author claims, as ethnographic text (p.5). For China specialists and medical anthropologists, Farquhar's cultural studies approach is theoretically and methodologically very interesting.

Farquhar's 'creative' methodology utilizes tools from various disciplines: postmodern rhetorical and narrative tools from literary criticism and critical anthropology, alongside more conventional fieldwork ethnography making use of Chinese textual materials. Her extensive field studies in China have already resulted in, among other works, a reference book on medical knowledge in the context of Chinese culture (1994); her ethnographic experience and anthropological knowledge of medicine now appear as 'red threads' informing her textual analysis.

Appetites is divided into two parts. Part one includes three chapters on food: 'Medicinal Meals', 'A Feast for the Mind', which is an analysis of Lu's novel *The Gourmet*, and 'Excess and Deficiency', Mo Yan's contribution on food and history. Part two is composed of three chapters discussing sex: 'Writing the Self: The Romance of the Personal', 'Sexual Science: The Representation of Behaviour', and 'Ars Erotica'. These chapters include discussions of Zhang's famous novel *Love Must Not Be Forgotten* and Zhou's film *Ermo*.¹

According to Farquhar, the all-pervading nationalism of the reform period insured continuity from Maoist state-promoted culture to contemporary popular culture: 'One of the principal arguments of this book is that everyday life in reform China is still inhabited by the nation's Maoist past' (p.10). Economic reforms do not necessarily imply changes in the manner the state instrumentalizes science and the authority of experts. Farquhar uses the example of a research survey on sexual behaviour and sex education pedagogy (chapter 5) to highlight that, as in the past, and within the broader context a 'civilizing project of national modernization and bourgeois normalization' (p.219), the authority of science is used to legitimize a state project.

In a number of less convincing examples, Farquhar tends to overestimate the impact of the 'nationalistic trend' and 'national character' within narratives of Chinese modernity. What, for instance, do bedchamber arts texts such as *Rouputuan* (Qing period) or the classical meanings of *xing* (sex) found in the *Huainanzi* (second century BCE) tell us about sexuality in China today (chapter 6)? Arguing that research methods show strong biases, and that an ethnography of sexuality is almost impossible to conduct, Farquhar draws the attention of readers to the 'official' sex of the fore-mentioned state ordered sociological survey, and its so-called 'scientific' methods embedded in naturalized and normalized representations of sexuality.

Although the author sometimes focuses too much on the discontinuities of 'discourses and embodied practices', *Appetites*, with its innovative approach, addresses a large readership and stands as a valuable work for specialists and non-specialists alike. <

- Farquhar, Judith, *Appetites: Food and Sex in Post-Socialist China*, Durham and London: Duke University Press (2002), pp. 341, ISBN 0-8223-2921-2 (paperback)

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- Liu et al., *Zhongguo dangdai xing wenhua: Zhongguo liangwan lie "xing wenming" diaocha baogao* (Contemporary Chinese Sexual Culture: Report of the "Sex Civilization" Survey on 20 000 Subjects), Shanghai: Sanlian Bookstore Press. (1992).
- Pan Suiming, *Zhongguo xing xianzhuang* (Sexuality in China Today), Beijing: Guangmingri chubanshe (1994).
- Pan Suiming, *Zhongguo hongdengqu jishi* (A True Record of China's Red Light Districts), Beijing: Qunyan chubanshe (1999).

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- 1 Film director ZHOU Xiaowen, novelist MO Yan, writer ZHANG Jie, and novelist LU Wenfu are among Farquhar's best-known 'ethnographic partners' (p.18). Their works are available to Western readers in English translation.

Chinese Media, Global Contexts

Review >
China

Few books discuss such a fast-changing phenomenon as China's media landscape in such an observant and up-to-date a way as *Chinese Media, Global Contexts* does. Continuing the line of Chin-Chuan Lee's trilogy, it covers a wide range of topics on the development of Chinese media in the light of globalization.¹

By Lokman TSUI

Looking back now, it is almost inconceivable how many transformations the Chinese media have undergone in the past ten years. The rise of cable and satellite television, the advent of the internet, and continuing marketization of the media are just a few of the monumental changes in the media landscape. *Chinese Media, Global Contexts* provides us with an excellent insight into the current situation, namely how the media affect China on different levels. The book covers a broad spectrum of articles, ranging from Greater China's pop culture to the media's reaction to landmark events such as entry to the WTO and the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. Two questions dominate the book. Firstly, how do current developments, of which globalization is the

most crucial one, shape the media in China? Secondly, how do the media, as interpreters of truth, deal with these changes and relay them to the public?

China's increasing participation in the globalization process leads to a higher level of nationalism. Playing out this nationalism has a double-edged character for the Party-State. After the demise of communism as the state ideology, state-sponsored nationalism has become the most convenient way of gluing modern-day China's 'conflicting regimes of truth' together (p.2). At the same time, the outbursts of nationalist outrage displayed during international crises, such as the 1999 bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade or the EP-3 spy plane incident of 2001, had to be restrained in order not to cause an international political embarrassment. The huge impact these events had is shown

by Rosen (pp.109-110), who argues that 'the attack on the Belgrade Embassy is likely to remain the key image of American foreign policy intentions for young Chinese'. The explosive character of nationalism, as Lee shows us (p.2), is founded on xenophobia (anti-Americanism) on the one hand and narcissism on the other. This narcissism is born of a feeling of indignity about China's current position in the wings of the global stage, where it is waiting to be accepted and to claim its rightful place. The media play a crucial role in this process. They continue to selectively construct an image and portray landmark events, such as the entry to the WTO and the 2008 Olympics, as glorious national achievements, while at the same time downplaying or even ignoring possible negative social side effects. In this sense, the media function as a mirror which >