

centric narratives of US–China isolation or rapprochement. While Gao acknowledges the growing literature on the connections between African Americans and the Chinese Communist Party at the height of the Cultural Revolution, her intervention is to focus on an earlier period of engagement between intellectual and cultural elites. Gao’s attention on the era of Jim Crow and the Chinese Exclusion Act depicts a time when travel between the US and China was especially fraught with political risks and financial challenges, particularly for non-white individuals. Second, for scholars of African American and Black studies, Gao presents a wealth of Chinese-language sources that complement our understanding of Black Internationalism. Notably, Gao’s framing situates Asia as a crucial component of ongoing discussions as to the foundational transnational ties that constructed African American identities in the US. In doing so, Gao persuasively argues that “Du Bois’s story of the color line in the twentieth century is incomplete without the Chinese perspective” (p. 14).

The book excels in its close reading of primary sources, which paint detailed descriptions of Gao’s subjects. While scholars may be familiar with some of Gao’s sources – for example the Du Bois papers in Amherst, Massachusetts – her interpretation, triangulation and complementation of these sources with extensive English and Chinese-language newspapers and periodicals productively contextualizes them within transnational frameworks. Where the book’s strength is its detailed narrative, deep engagement and contextualization of a broad range of sources, it could have benefited from a more comprehensive introduction and conclusion to better situate its intervention within broader frameworks of transnational exchanges and solidarities. The relatively brief literature review in the introduction, for example, notes interventions by Julia Lovell on global Maoism and Keisha Blain on Black Internationalism, but there is more limited engagement with theoretical frameworks of foreign exchange and relations “from below” within the body chapters. Moreover, the book leaves open the question of how productive these encounters were in fundamentally shifting the perspectives of political decision-makers in Beijing. Nevertheless, *Arise, Africa! Roar, China!* is a solid addition to this growing field within Chinese history, and individual chapters will be particularly useful for expanding syllabi in courses on China, global history and African American studies.

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Questioning the Chinese Model: Oppositional Political Novels in Early Twenty-First Century China

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Zhansui Yu’s *Questioning the Chinese Model: Oppositional Political Novels in Early Twenty-First Century China* showcases a group of well-known Chinese writers who critique the post-Mao Chinese political economy through the means of fiction. Dubbing those fictional works “oppositional political novels,” Yu offers a crucial insight that critique of the post-socialist Chinese political economy is not the reserve of exiled Chinese political dissidents and West-based academics but is also a well-engaged concern among some heavyweight intellectuals who reside within China and



negotiate the authorities creatively. Yu's main argument is that those selective few intellectuals are taking on the Chinese model – or what Pei Minxin in his *China's Trapped Transition* (Harvard University Press, 2006) calls “developmental autocracy” – in toto, going beyond finding flaws with official corruption and shortcomings of its despotic ruling elites. Taking their departure from the temperate “anti-corruption novels” of a previous era, the “oppositional political novels,” according to Yu, question the fundamentals of the system as manifested in its “political dictatorship, state predation, and stark hedonism” (p. 174). Yu convincingly shows that even as state-promoted nationalism and popular confidence in China's international stature sway the masses to embrace the party-state for its delivery of material successes, some intellectuals within China are piercing through the veneer of state propaganda and seeing the causes for regime decline and systemic decay.

The book is well organized into three parts. The introduction offers “oppositional political novels” as the theoretical framework and a principle for inclusion and exclusion of fictional works produced in recent years from mainland-based Chinese writers. The first chapter accounts for the sociopolitical background for the emergence of this genre of fiction. It is by far the best chapter of the book as it brings together a rich list of references – sociological and anthropological investigations of the Chinese political economy since the 1990s. Yu also innovatively discerns a tripartite typology of the post-socialist Chinese political economy as consisting of the Party, the intellectuals and the people, and explains how this trilateral relationship has evolved into a predatory Party terrorizing and co-opting the intellectuals while ruthlessly exploiting the labouring masses for economic growth. The introduction and the first chapter make up the first part as they combine to show the material basis with which fiction writers engage in their “oppositional” politics. The second part, consisting of five chapters, offers close readings of five novels which Yu considers to be illustrations of “oppositional political novels.” In chronological order of the works' publication time, the five writers showcased are Jiang Rong, Yan Lianke, Hu Fayun, Chan Koonchung and Yu Hua. In this part, Yu mostly relies on the methodology of reading the novels as political/national allegories. The third part, that is the epilogue, attempts to account for the reasons that those novels were published or circulated under a cultural regime that is well known to be intolerant of politically engaged criticism. This part is the weakest as Yu offers little in the manner of empirical evidence. The explanation mostly hinges on the hypothesis that censorship provokes and produces counter-censorship strategies and techniques, which in turn push those fictions to creative extremes. While the hypothesis is legitimate, the lack of empirical evidence makes the argument appear disembodied.

The book suffers from its loose temporal demarcations, in both the author's phraseology and their data selection. Phrases such as “today's China” and “present-day China” appear scores of times in the book, making the reader wonder about the tremendous changes that have taken place in China's political economy as well as cultural economy under Xi Jinping's rule. For a critique of “the Chinese model,” which refers to the era when the Chinese economy saw rapid growth, Yu's political commentary frequently spills over to critique the dictatorship and oppression in the Maoist years, especially in the chapter on *Wolf Totem*. While Maoist totalitarianism also qualifies as a “model” given Maoism's trappings in the global 1960s and beyond, as discussed in Julia Lovell's *Maoism: A Global History* (Knopf, 2019), revolutionary Maoism and the Dengist Chinese developmental state gained global tractions for starkly different reasons and therefore should be treated as two separate subjects.

Some conceptual tools Yu references in sociology also do not congeal with his own subject matter. For instance, Yu's use of Gramsci's concept of “organic intellectuals” (meaning the manufacturers of sociopolitical consent in a given political economy) (p. 77) detracts from his humanistic condemnation of post-Tiananmen Chinese intellectuals who “sell their souls and conscience to the Party state for power, social status, and wealth” (p. 47). In general, Yu's liberal use of strong terms against the Dengist political economy seems to be more effective in condemning than explaining it. Yu's dispute with Jiang Rong with regard to the impact of the Mongol empire(s) upon

human history also shows a limitation of some compartments in the field of Chinese studies. Disparaging that the “Yuan dynasty is one of the shortest major imperial dynasties in Chinese history” (p. 63), Yu seems to be reflecting a parochial Sinology perspective. Viewed in world history perspective and seeing beyond the Sinitic sphere, the Mongol empire(s) was a trans-Eurasian geopolitical conglomerate and a “world order” as proposed by Ayşe Zarakol in her *Before the West: The Rise and Fall of Eastern World Orders* (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

Despite those not insignificant issues, Yu’s directness in bridging hard-hitting Chinese intellectual poignancy and the country’s increasingly opaque political development is a welcome effort in the mapping of politically engaged intellectual expression in late reform-era China. The book can also be gainfully used as a secondary source in an undergraduate syllabus on world literature, especially of the genre of political fiction.

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Working the System: Motion Picture, Filmmakers, and Subjectivities in Mao-Era China, 1949–1966

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In *Working the System: Motion Picture, Filmmakers, and Subjectivities in Mao-Era China, 1949–1966*, Qiliang He presents an alternative paradigm to shed light on the lived experiences and careers of the following five post-1949 Shanghai-based filmmakers: Zheng Junli, Zhao Dan, Sun Yu, Wu Yonggang and Xie Jin. He finds that presenting the experiences of these filmmakers and their relationships with the Chinese Communist Party as bifurcated narratives of resistance or accommodation has inevitably “pitted ‘the ‘good’ and ‘innocent’ people against ‘bad’ socialism” (p. 7). Instead, He argues that the filmmakers during Mao-era China were “ordinary citizens” (p. 9), who had universal needs and desires just like everyone else. Through their filmmaking careers as “subjectivity practices” and working the new political and cultural system during Mao-era China, they sought financial gains, political status, job security, their artistic reputation and legacy.

In chapter one, He explores how Zheng Junli’s historical and biographical films in the 1950s became a “site of knowledge production,” and Zheng in turn became “a significant contributor to reconceptualizing and restructuring historiography in Mao-era China” (p. 18). He argues that during the 1950s and 1960s, Chinese historiography underwent a “disciplinization” process whereby China’s past was told and represented by CCP historians as a classed revolutionary narrative that bolstered the contributions of labourers and peasants to the development of the founding of the CCP (p. 19). Amid the debacle of the campaign against the film *The Life of Wu Xun* (dir. Sun Yu) in May 1951, Zheng Junli found himself caught in the “entanglement” (p. 20) between Marxist historians and filmmakers when he made the biographical films about “patriotic figures” (p. 35) Song Jingshi and Lin Zexu during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Zheng Junli’s balancing act to present both historicist and revolutionary aesthetics in his films might have raised his reputation as an artist, but at the same time, he was entangled in the “web of communication” (p. 42)