

Kinfolk (1949), Conn never attempts a discussion of how the contents of her China books might have influenced readers' views about China and the Chinese.

Conn presents a more somber Pearl Buck as a workaholic who kept herself busy in a life "darkened by the failure of her first marriage, her daughter's mental illness and her sterility" (p. 219). Although personally happier after her second marriage to Richard Walsh, he believes her unexpected fame after receiving the 1938 Nobel Prize for Literature damaged rather than bolstered her self-confidence and turned her more toward public advocacy of her humanitarian concerns. Hovering in the background Conn sees the shadow of her patriarchal father who disdained novels and prized evangelical religion. Yet, Buck embodied her mother's values, promoting humanitarian causes and devoting herself to a progressive ideal of the United States rather than her father's religious purposes. Having read most of Buck's work—but I must hasten to add that in spite of a shared surname I am not related either to Buck or her first husband, John Lossing Buck—I concur with Conn's evaluation that Buck remained "an essentially isolated woman" (p. 372) who could share little of her inner self except through her writing.

There are some aspects of Buck's life into which Conn does not penetrate. Her relationship with her second husband—Richard Walsh, who served as both her editor and publisher, until becoming an invalid following a stroke in 1953—remains underdeveloped; we learn almost nothing of the sometimes difficult relations between Buck and her adopted children. While suggesting that she could be distant and imperious, he does not quote many of the chilling judgments Buck could voice to those closest to her, such as this one that appeared in a March 7, 1973, obituary in the *New York Times*: "I married two men in my lifetime who were unable to support me; I have always supported myself and my family, and it's been a large family." In his treatment of Buck's long fascination with children of mixed Asian and Caucasian heritage, Conn does not plumb fully the meaning of this enduring motif in her fiction and humanitarian activities. I had expected a somewhat more daring book from Conn, but he has presented a solid one, carefully documented, balanced in judgment and still generous to its subject.

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Language Shattered: Contemporary Chinese Poetry and Duoduo. By MAGHIEL VAN CREVEL. Leiden: Research School CNWS, 1996. x, 355 pp.

The very first full-length book in English devoted to the study of Chinese "experimental poetry," Maghiel van Crevel's *Language Shattered: Contemporary Chinese Poetry and Duoduo* merits attention primarily for the highly valuable yet hitherto neglected subjects it chooses to examine: Chinese "experimental poetry" and its most innovative and maverick representative, Duoduo. Divided into two relatively independent parts, the book first elaborates on the general history of the development of Chinese poetry since its earliest detachment from the communist orthodoxy and then focuses on Duoduo's poetic texts as a model of experimental poetry.

Despite his regret that "unfortunately the study of PRC literature often involves PRC politics" (p. 3), Crevel, in part 1, conscientiously charts the historical/cultural milieu in the PRC, with an emphasis on the rise of nonofficial (what he calls "unofficial") literary activities and publications. It is most significant that the book

introduces the early underground poets (such as Shizhi and Genzi) as predecessors of the “obscure” poets and the early poetic coteries (such as the Sun’s Column and the Baiyangdian Group) as forerunners of the Today School. Although the author uses abundant sources to re-create the literary scene of the time, his attempt to present an all-encompassing picture of Chinese experimental poetry remains at the descriptive level, providing less profound understanding of either the politicocultural intricacies of the literary events or the aesthetic complexities of the poetic works (with the exception of Shizhi, of whom the analysis is quite convincing) than could have been done. For example, the omission of a discussion of Genzi’s poetry (the first aesthetically—rather than ideologically—revolutionary poetry in the PRC that admittedly served as a major influence on Duoduo, the true protagonist of the book) is regrettable.

Crevel himself points out that his conclusions are “crudely simplified” (p. 85), and the simplifications bring more nebulosity than transparency to his arguments as he outlines the development of contemporary Chinese fiction. For example, on the one hand, he claims that “the obscure poets’ faith was in Man, but the young poets’ [those who emerged later] faith was in Poetry” (p. 85); on the other hand, he makes a somewhat conflicting statement that the tendencies of “a rehumanization of the Self and the return of the individual” “grew stronger as the 1980s unfolded” (p. 70). Such conceptions as “self” and “individual,” in fact, were under greater and greater suspicion in poetry “as the 1980s unfolded,” and even the “faith in Poetry” was not maintained in most of the poetic groups, while dehumanization/desubjectification and ironization of poetic language became increasingly prevalent.

One of the major, though underdeveloped, themes of the book is its attempt to undo politics in “Poetry,” as a judicious counteraction to the omnipresent concern for politics that held sway over Chinese poetry and poetic criticism during Mao’s epoch and beyond. In part 2, Crevel argues at times that a political reading of Duoduo’s poetry, as “poetry about poetry,” would mar its “originality” (p. 179), or at least “does not yield to the greatest degree of coherence” (p. 178). The question thus arises: does Duoduo’s poetry or Chinese experimental poetry in general, as the title of this book, “Shattered Language,” adequately suggests, maintain any coherence to be reconstructed through interpretation? As a crude reflexive political criticism is invalidated, must we deny the ingrained political potential of contemporary Chinese poetry deep in the ineffaceable memory of the lyrical subject? Is it destined that the aesthetic and the political, or the universal and the Chinese, have to be dichotomized?

Thanks to Crevel’s acquaintance with contemporary Chinese language as a politicocultural complex, many of his textual analyses are revealing. For example, he discovers how the word “dongde” [understand] is to be read as a politically contaminated term in the first place, so as to see its rhetorical potential in Duoduo’s poem (p. 228).

On the other hand, Crevel’s repudiation of a sophisticated theoretical perspective—deconstruction in particular (pp. 111–12)—subdues the otherwise more penetrative power of his analysis, not simply because Duoduo’s poetics is distinctively deconstructive (in both the rhetorical and the political senses), but also because the persistence in “close reading” at the expense of theoretical framework causes lack of focus of the reading strategy. Willy-nilly, toward the end of his “close reading” of Duoduo’s later poems, Crevel does grasp the deconstructivist inherent in Duoduo (though not in his own thesis): “Language is uncontrollable and unreliable for representing reality” (p. 255). I only wish that the “sparks of wisdom” could have formed a thematic thread throughout.

In any case, besides the elaborate reading of Duoduo's poems, the book deserves further credit for the copious introductory materials in the field of contemporary Chinese poetry, as well as Crevel's careful (re-)translations of Duoduo's poems.

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Astronomy and Mathematics in Ancient China: The Zhou bi suan jing. By CHRISTOPHER CULLEN. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. xiv, 241 pp. \$69.95.

This is the first volume in a series of monographs to be published by the Needham Research Institute featuring work on East Asian science and culture which develops or links up with the encyclopedic *Science and Civilisation in China* series. The author, Christopher Cullen, is Senior Lecturer in the History of Chinese Science and Medicine at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and Deputy-Director of the Needham Research Institute in Cambridge.

The *Zhou bi suan jing* (a.k.a. *Zhou bei suan jing*) is a collection of ancient Chinese texts on astronomy and mathematics traditionally attributed to the early years of the Zhou dynasty, hence the title "Gnomon of the Zhou." As the author shows in his detailed analysis of the contents, however, the work was most likely compiled during the former Han Dynasty in the first century B.C.E. "by an individual or by a group with some common interest" (p. 140) and "cannot be understood as a single unified book" (p. 101). Most of the *Zhou bi* is taken up by calculations of the dimensions of the cosmos using observations of the shadow cast by a vertical pole gnomon. Analysis of the text shows that its author(s) was an adherent of the *gai tian* cosmography in which an umbrella-like heaven rotates about a vertical axis above an essentially flat earth. The text is unique, according to Cullen, in being "the only rationally based and fully mathematised account of a flat earth cosmos" (p. xi), in addition to being the "principal surviving document of early Chinese science" in the view of A. C. Graham. Scholarly opinions as to the value of the *Zhou bi* have diverged considerably. So that readers may judge its value for themselves, Cullen's stated objective is to locate the text in its historical and scientific context and make it accessible to anyone with an interest in the history of Chinese science and culture.

As clear and precise as Cullen's translation of the *Zhou bi* itself is, it occupies only 35 pages or barely 15 percent (pp. 171–206) of the volume. The preceding four chapters (pp. 1–170), "The Background of the *Zhou bi*," "The *Zhou bi* and Its Contents," "The Origins of the Work," and "The Later History of the *Zhou bi*," are equally if not more valuable in providing a magisterial account of the intellectual, institutional, scientific, and political context which produced the text. In the process of elucidating the background of the *Zhou bi* and helping the reader make sense of the concepts and methods invoked by its author(s), Cullen provides a lucid and highly readable survey of the development of Chinese cosmography, the cultural and ideological importance of calendrical astronomy in ancient China, the main methods of observation of astronomical phenomena, the problem of the calendar and successive early Chinese solutions to it, Chinese computational procedures with examples, as well as a capsule history of the general history of the development of early Chinese astronomical theory and practice. Following the translation are four appendices which deal with substantive aspects of the main commentary to the text, that of Zhao Shuang